

AUGUST STRINDBERG

★

LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

THE FATHER

LADY JULIE

PLAYING WITH FIRE

THE BOND

ANGLO - SWEDISH LITERARY FOUNDATION

AUGUST STRINDBERG

★

LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS  
AND OTHER PLAYS



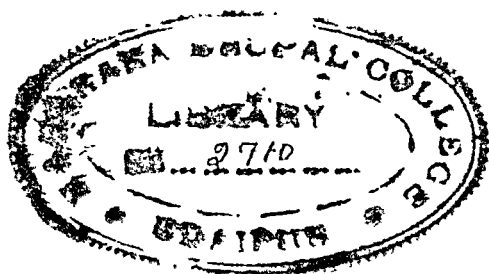
JONATHAN CAPE  
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE  
LONDON

FIRST PUBLISHED MCMXXX

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
BUTLER & TANNER LTD  
FROME

## CONTENTS

LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS	page 9
THE FATHER	97
LADY JULIE	165
PLAYING WITH FIRE	237
THE BOND	279





The Trustees of the Anglo-Swedish Literary Foundation have pleasure in announcing that preparations are being made for a third volume of Strindberg plays, including the following historical dramas, *Master Olof*, *Gustavus Vasa*, *Erik XIV*, and *The Saga of the Folkungs*.

# LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

A FAIRY PLAY  
IN FIVE ACTS

★

Written 1881-82

Translated by

E. CLASSEN

•  
(Verse translations by C. D. LOCOCK)

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE OLD MAN IN THE CHURCH TOWER.

PETER.

LISA.

THE FAIRY.

THE HOBGOBLIN.

THE RATS.

THE MAJOR-DOMO.

THE TAX COLLECTOR.

THE ADVOCATE.

THE COURT USHER.

THE PETITIONER.

THE FIRST FRIEND.

THE SECOND FRIEND.

THE LADY FRIEND.

THE PILLORY.

THE STATUE.

THE COACHBUILDER.

THE SHOEMAKER.

THE CHIROPODIST.

THE PAVIOUR.

THE RELATIVE.

THE MAYOR.

ONE OF THE PEOPLE.

THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN.

THE EARL MARSHAL.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHER ROYAL.

THE COURT CHAPLAIN.

THE VIZIR.

THE COURT POET.

THE BRIDE.

THE SINGER.

DEATH.

THE WISE MAN.

ST. BARTHOLOMEW.

ST. LAURENCE.

THE BROOM.

THE BIER.

ACT I:       *The Chamber in the Church Tower.*

ACT II: (A) *The Forest.*

          (B) *The Rich Man's Hall.*

ACT III:     *The Market Place with the Town Hall.*

ACT IV: (A) *The Caliph's Palace.*

          (B) *The Seashore.*

ACT V:       *The Country Church.*

The Drama plays in the Middle Ages.

# ACT I

## IN THE CHURCH TOWER

*The Chamber of the Church tower. The shutters in the background are open; through them one sees the sky sparkling with stars; roofs of houses, covered with snow; the highest windows in the gables are brightly lit up. An old chair, a brazier, a table; an image of the Virgin with a candle before it. In the chamber are upright beams cutting obliquely across the room, two of which, in the middle of the room, are so thick that a person might be concealed in them.*

*Chant in unison from the church below:*

A solis ortus cardine  
Et usque terræ limitem  
Christum canamus principem  
Natum Maria Virgine.



# LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

## SCENE I

*(The OLD MAN comes up the steps to the tower with a rat-trap, a sheaf of corn and a bowl of porridge, which he sets on the floor.)*

THE OLD MAN. Here is the porridge for the Hobgoblin, and he has honestly earned it this year; twice he has wakened me up when I fell asleep and forgot the shutters, and once he rang the bell when a fire broke out! Happy Christmas, Hobgoblin! *(He takes up the rat-trap, baits and sets it.)* And here you have your Christmas fare, you accursed rats! . . .

A VOICE. Curse not Christmas!

OLD MAN. I believe the place is haunted to-night! — Ah! It's the cold growing worse, it always makes the beams creak as in an old ship. Here's your Christmas fare, and now perhaps you'll stop gnawing through the bell-ropes and eating the tallow off the axles, you cursed lot!

A VOICE. Curse not Christmas!

OLD MAN. There it is again: the room is haunted! Christmas Eve! Yes, yes. . . . *(He puts the rat-trap on the floor.)* There! they have their portion. Now it's the turn of these feathered creatures! They must have corn, of course! to soil the roof-leads for me! Yes, indeed! But it's the Church Council that pays for it, and it's not my business; but if I were to ask for another penny on my wages, then they couldn't afford it. Nobody would see it; but if you stick out a sheaf of corn on a pole once a year, it looks very generous! This is a fine one, this is! And generosity is a virtue. . . . If we were to go shares in it, I should get back the porridge that I gave the Hobgoblin! *(He shakes the sheaf and collects the grain in a bowl.)*

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

A VOICE. He is robbing Christmas, he is robbing Christmas!

OLD MAN. Now I'll put it on the pole, and then it will look like a sign; and it will serve as a sign too: it will show what's not to be found inside. (*He sticks out the sheaf through the opening in the tower.*) Oh, you old human burrow down there! (*He shakes his fist over the town below.*) Shame on you! (*He spits through the slit, returns to the Chamber, and sees the light in front of the Virgin.*) Has the boy been doing this? The times are not such that we can burn candles unnecessarily. (*He blows out the candle and puts it in his pocket.*)

A VOICE. Woe! Woe!

(*The figure of the Virgin moves its head three times and a bright beam of light emerges from it.*)

OLD MAN (*starts back*). Is hell loose to-night?

A VOICE. Heaven!

OLD MAN. Peter! Peter! – Where are you? – My eyes! Make a light! – My son! My son!

STATUE OF THE VIRGIN. *My son!*

OLD MAN (*grotes his way down the steps*). My eyes! – Fires of hell! (*Goes down the steps.*)

### SCENE 2

(*The Rats (NISSE and NILLA) come in from the right, one following the other; they have mourning crêpe on their tails.*)

NISSE. Do you notice a smell of fried bacon?

NILLA. I vow I do! Be careful, Nisse, I see the trap

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

over there! (*Sits on her hind legs.*) It was in the very same one our little ones were lost. Oh, oh, oh!

NISSE. If only we could hit on some trick to play the nasty old wretch, it would do my heart good. Can't you see if he has left behind anything he values?

NILLA. Suppose we gnaw through the beams, so that the bells tumble about his ears.

NISSE. Oh! Nilla, you know I have only one poor tooth left in my mouth.

NILLA. Yes, but I have two . . . and where there's a will . . . but you have no feeling for your children

. . .

NISSE. Now, now, don't let us quarrel on Christmas Eve.

NILLA. Hush! What's this?

NISSE. A bowl of porridge!

NILLA. Which the Old Man has left behind!

NISSE. For the Hobgoblin! He's afraid of him!

NILLA. Now I have it! We'll eat up the porridge and then . . .

NISSE. The Hobgoblin will come down on him!

NILLA. And he can make things hot when he's angry!

(*They go up to the bowl of porridge and eat.*)

NISSE. Move up a bit, and make room for me.

NILLA. Hush! the stairs are creaking!

NISSE. Now I see the bottom of the bowl! And here's the lump of butter.

NILLA. Help me here with the corner!

NISSE. That's done! Now let's wipe our mouths and be off! (*They scurry out to the left.*)



# LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

## SCENE 3

(*The HOBGOBLIN climbs down the bell-rope.*)

THE HOBGOBLIN (*goes about searching*). Where's my Christmas porridge? Ah! I sniffed the smell of it from afar! To-night in this cold it will taste really good, and I hope he has given me a big lump of butter this year, as I have been so decent to him! And now, little stomach, get ready! (*He lets out his belt.*) If I let out two more holes in the belt it will be right. (*Sees the bowl.*) Ha! ha! What's this? An empty bowl! What has come over the old man-hater? Has he grown mean and arrogant! Or does he mock me by putting out an empty bowl . . . there has been porridge in it and – (*smells*) butter too – ohee! Well! – Well! I am sorry for you, Old Man; I shall have to punish you, but Hobgoblins exist once and for all to punish and reward! I must sit down here and think out some real Christmas box. (*Sits in the chair.*) Let me see! The Old Man has locked himself up here with his son; he wants to protect him from the evils and temptations of men; the Old Man has seen much of the world and hates it; the young one has never been outside the church door, and has only seen the world from the tower up here, but I know it lures him, just because he has seen it in a bird's-eye view. The Old Man has only one real desire in life: that his son shall succeed him and thereby be spared the struggles of life and the cruelty of men. Good! It is this desire that I will frustrate. It is his only vulnerable point! Very well! I will summon his godmother and she shall take a hand with the boy and show him all the splendour of the world; and the Old Man will

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

have nothing more to do in the matter! Dreams of youth—I know their power! We shall see! (*Blows a whistle.*)

### SCENE 4

THE FAIRY (*comes out from the beam dressed as an old woman with a big brown cloak and stick*). Good evening, my lad!

HOBGOBLIN. Good evening, old woman! Can you lead a young man from the straight path? Now, now, understand me rightly.

FAIRY. It depends!

HOBGOBLIN. No, it can't be done in that costume! You see it's a question of the Old Man's son.

FAIRY. Our Peter!

HOBGOBLIN. Exactly!—Silence, old woman, now I am talking! I am fond of the boy, I have been ever since he was born; we two, you and I, were his godparents and we have our duties; his education has been neglected; he has not seen the world and he is fifteen years old to-day; I want him to go out into the world and look round him so that he may do us credit. Have you any objections?

FAIRY. None whatever! But I fear he will meet with difficulties from which we can't spare him, since our power does not extend beyond the walls of this church.

HOBGOBLIN. That's true. I must rack my brains for another idea! Now I have it! As his godparents, each of us will give him a present which will help him in every situation of life.

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

FAIRY. What will you give him? Tell me!

HOBGOBLIN. Life is a bit of a tangle, as you know, and the lad is young; he has not yet learnt by a thorough education among men all the arts by which they get their wishes fulfilled. Well now, I ask nothing more of life, for I know all it can give us, and so he shall have my wishing-ring. And yours?

FAIRY. Your gift is all very well, but when some day, he has had everything he has wished for, he will be no better off than if he had wandered like a blind man; so I will make him a gift which will show him the real nature of things – I will give him a good companion on his way.

HOBGOBLIN. Feminine?

FAIRY. Of course!

HOBGOBLIN. You are wise! Well! Now you must take a hand with the boy and see that he gets away from here.

FAIRY. But how? He obeys and fears his father.

HOBGOBLIN. Nonsense! Do your hocus-pocus and show him all the splendour in the festive homes down there; that will do it.

FAIRY. You think so?

HOBGOBLIN. I know youth! – See, here is my ring, and now to work.

FAIRY. Is it right to play with the fates of men?

HOBGOBLIN. We only play with men; their fates, well, we cannot control them. The boy must go out into the world sooner or later, and none before him has gone out into life so well equipped as he! When he has finished his journey, we can talk about the matter again. Are you ready?

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

FAIRY (*approaches the bear from which she came*). At once!

HOBGOBLIN. Then I'll whistle.

(*He whistles and vanishes in the ether bear.*)

### SCENE 5

(*PETER descends the steps which lead up into the tower.*)

PETER. Who's there?

FAIRY (*advances, dressed in white, like an angel*). Your godmother, Peter. Don't you know me?

PETER. Oh, it was you who took me in your arms the time I fell out of the tower. What do you want with me to-day?

FAIRY. I will give you a Christmas present!

PETER. Present! What's that?

FAIRY. Something which gives pleasure!

PETER. Pleasure! What's that?

FAIRY. The fulfilment of one's wishes!

PETER. Wishes? Now I think I begin to understand.

FAIRY. Have you never felt when you stand out on the balcony, that you seem to be drawn, to be lured down into the depths?

PETER. Yes, I have! You see that dark line over there, where light and darkness meet; in the daytime it looks different and when the wind blows it moves.

FAIRY. The forest!

PETER. What is it like in the forest?

FAIRY. It is cool and beautiful!

PETER. That's good. You see, sometimes I am drawn to it so strongly that I want to jump out of the tower window and sail through the air like the birds.

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

FAIRY. And beyond the fringe of the forest!

PETER. Is there anything beyond? What is it?

FAIRY. There lies the world!

PETER. The world? What's that?

FAIRY. Would you like to see it?

PETER. Is it amusing?

FAIRY. Some say yes, most say no. Come over here, I will show you some scenes from the motley picture that men call life.

*(The background becomes transparent.)*

Do you see that big house in the market place, with lights in every window? There lives the rich man. Now look into the rooms: a lighted Christmas tree stands on the table, hung with presents of all kinds: the golden fruits of the South, which have come in ships across the sea, the hidden treasures of the earth, to which men bend the knee and which reflect the candle flames in their glitter; but do you see the light in the faces of the little ones? That is the sun of earthly life, that is joy! That is something you don't know, poor child, but you shall know it. Wouldn't you like to?

PETER. Who is the good fairy going round and giving the children the golden fruits?

FAIRY. That is the mother!

PETER. Mother? What is that?

FAIRY. You too had a mother, but she died before you grew up.

PETER. And the old man, sitting in the corner with the gentle look in his face.

FAIRY. That is the father, who lives his childhood again in memory.



## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

FAIRY. And beyond the fringe of the forest!

PETER. Is there anything beyond? What is it?

FAIRY. There lies the world!

PETER. The world? What's that?

FAIRY. Would you like to see it?

PETER. Is it amusing?

FAIRY. Some say yes, most say no. Come over here, I will show you some scenes from the motley picture that men call life.

*(The background becomes transparent.)*

Do you see that big house in the market place, with lights in every window? There lives the rich man. Now look into the rooms: a lighted Christmas tree stands on the table, hung with presents of all kinds: the golden fruits of the South, which have come in ships across the sea, the hidden treasures of the earth, to which men bend the knee and which reflect the candle flames in their glitter; but do you see the light in the faces of the little ones? That is the sun of earthly life, that is joy! That is something you don't know, poor child, but you shall know it. Wouldn't you like to?

PETER. Who is the good fairy going round and giving the children the golden fruits?

FAIRY. That is the mother!

PETER. Mother? What is that?

FAIRY. You too had a mother, but she died before you grew up.

PETER. And the old man, sitting in the corner with the gentle look in his face.

FAIRY. That is the father, who lives his childhood again in memory.

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

PETER. The father! But he looks so friendly!

FAIRY. Yes, for he does not love himself alone.

PETER. And the youth who puts his arm round the young girl's waist, and now (*he becomes excited*) he presses his cheek against hers – their lips meet – what is that they're doing? Do people talk like that out in the world?

FAIRY. That is love's way of talking.

PETER. Love! How wonderful it must be to see it all!

FAIRY. Wait! – Now look up there in the gable window. A single candle burns there; a poor, wretched candle.

### TABLEAU

PETER. Poverty! That I know! No, show me something beautiful!

FAIRY (*looks at him*). You think of nothing but pleasure. But now, look steadily at that solitary Christmas candle. It shines feebly, but it shines warmly on the contented table of poverty.

PETER. No. I want to see something beautiful.

FAIRY. Oh, do you? Is there anything more beautiful than – but you will see! – Look over there – at the palace, where the king lives!

### TABLEAU

PETER. Oh!

FAIRY. Do you see the gorgeous clothes and the glittering crystal; do you see how the walls reflect a hundredfold the gleam of the lights, and how in the middle of winter red roses and blue lilies put out their blossoms?



## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

PETER. Oh!

FAIRY. And those young girls with flowing locks, pouring the red wine into silver cups . . .

PETER. That's where I want to be!

FAIRY. And now the white-clad cooks carry in the dishes . . .

PETER. Oh!

FAIRY. The Heralds knock on the floor with their staves, the trumpets sound. . . .

*(A bell is heard to strike three times. The tower chamber resumes its former appearance.)*

Alas, time is up! Peter, would you like to go out into the world and see what life is like?

PETER. Yes, yes!

FAIRY. Both the good and evil.

PETER. The evil I think I know; I would like to know the good.

FAIRY. You think so! But you will soon see that all good is not good and all evil is not evil.

PETER. I do want to go! Away from here!

FAIRY. You shall go! — But first I will bestow a gift on you to help you on your journey, a gift that may be useful to you. But when you have it, you have more than other men, and therefore more will some day be required of you!

PETER. Let me see it.

FAIRY. This ring has the power of fulfilling all your wishes, to your advantage, but to nobody's harm!

PETER. It's a finering. But what will the Old Man say?

FAIRY. He will only find his just punishment, punishment for his selfishness.

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

PETER. Yes, that's right! But I'm sorry for him all the same.

FAIRY. Don't grieve for him. I'll keep a watch on his sorrow.

PETER. Sorrow! Nothing else? Sorrow, he says, is the only pleasure in life! Let him sit and enjoy it, I'll give him occasion enough for it!

FAIRY. Finally, young man, would you like to take some provision with you from the Wise Man on your journey?

PETER. What would it be? Good advice?

FAIRY. Yes.

PETER. Oh, I have so much of that.

FAIRY. I know! – And I know what happens to good advice. Good-bye, then! May life teach you to live, and when you have finished your travels, whether you are great or little, lucky or unlucky, rich or poor, learned or ignorant – you will be above all a man, and a worthy one! – Farewell!

*(She vanishes in the pillar.)*

### SCENE 6

PETER (*alone*). And so, Peter, you are to go out into life. Many have done that before you! But are things so difficult out there? True, I have stood on the roof of the church and looked down on the street at the people crawling round one another; one appears here and goes there, another appears there and comes here. Everything seems to me to happen so calmly and quietly; I have never seen them trampling on each other, though they are as thick as midges. I have seen

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

dogs and cobblers' boys fighting, but older people—never! The Old Man and I never come to blows, though we pass each other on the stairs ten times a day; it's true that he has beaten me, but I have never struck him. And I shouldn't think that people are so bad as they say either! Wasn't there a fire the other day at a rich merchant's house? Yes, and didn't poor wretches come running from every side; and didn't they go up to the rich man and save his things? Yes, I saw how they carried away the silver from his table, carried it out of the town, where they hid it behind hay-stacks so that it shouldn't be burnt up. Wasn't that kind of them? Well, we'll see, we'll see! Meanwhile, my dear Peter, you are going out into the world to look about you and make use of your gifts! (*Looks at the ring.*) Now, let us see! What shall I wish first?

(*The OLD MAN enters through the wall.*)

### SCENE 7

PETER. Aha! Here's the Old Man! I didn't hear you on the stair; which way did you come?

OLD MAN (*uneasily*). Did you see?

PETER. No.

OLD MAN. Let me look at you. (*Gazes at him.*) Something has happened here.

PETER. Nothing! Nothing at all!

OLD MAN. My son, it will soon be midnight! Won't you go to your room and get to bed so that I can lock up after you?

PETER. You always want to lock me in! Father, tell me, have you never thought of letting me go out into

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

the world? Surely you don't mean me to sit here to all eternity and run to seed?

OLD MAN. I have seen life, I know it's Sodom's apple, and that's why I want to protect you!

PETER. But perhaps life is not so sour as you say!

OLD MAN. What do you know about it?

PETER. Oh, I can see something, after all, from my lofty perch! Come here and I'll show you.

OLD MAN. What can you show me that I don't know already?

PETER (*leads the OLD MAN to the opening in the tower*). I can! Look there! Do you see that big house up there in the market-place?

OLD MAN. Well! But make haste! Before the clock strikes twelve you must be in bed!

PETER. Do you see the Christmas tree with its gold and silver?

OLD MAN. Only paper, my boy!

PETER. And the golden fruits of the South!

OLD MAN. Worm-eaten . . .

PETER. And the sun, and joy, how it shines in the children's faces. . . .

OLD MAN. But the next moment distorted by envy . . .

PETER. And the old man sitting there, blessed in years and contented . . .

OLD MAN. A lie! He is trembling in his heart for the rent which must be paid at the New Year. . . .

PETER. He, the rich man!

OLD MAN. Hides his approaching ruin! . . .

PETER. And those young people; do you see how he stretches out his arm . . .

OLD MAN. For his father's purse!

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

PETER. Shame! . . . their lips meet . . .

OLD MAN. In lust!

PETER. What's that? . . . And now—look at that gable-room with the lonely candle . . .

OLD MAN. Prompted by caution, which requires darkness.

PETER. By the still light of peace and contentment . . .

OLD MAN. Which they have stolen from the grocer's shop! The whole band of thieves sits discussing the next raid on the shops of the town. I know all about it, I tell you! And up there in the palace where thousands of lights glitter and are reflected in the poison streams of wine; there they roll about, with their empty heads and empty hearts pretending to think and feel for the welfare of the people; there they roll about among the bottles and the dishes . . .

PETER. Why do you talk so fast? Let me continue . . .

OLD MAN. No . . . go away! Obey me, my boy!

PETER. Yes, away from here! I will go out into the world! I want to see children's faces, even if they are shadowed by the mask of envy. I want to taste the fruits of the South, even if they are worm-eaten. I want to drink the wine, even if it may turn to poison. I want to put my arm round a girl's waist, even if there is a penniless old father in the corner by the fire. I want to have gold and silver, even if they prove in the end to be only dross.

OLD MAN. Fires of Hell! Who has been here?

A VOICE. Curse not Christmas!

PETER. What is that? Everything is so queer here

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

to-night; queerer than usual! Father, look at me! . . .  
Oh! What's this? It is not his face!

OLD MAN (*on his knees*). My son! Listen to your father!  
Obey the Old Man's voice: he only wishes you well.  
Stay within these peaceful walls!

PETER. It's too late!

OLD MAN. What do I see? That ring! Who gave it to  
you? (*Would take it from PETER.*)

PETER. Who are you? You are not my father!

OLD MAN. Your guilty father, your unhappy father,  
who is under the spell of the Powers!

(*The OLD MAN is transformed into a large black cat.*)

PETER. Jesus and Mary help!

(*Strong rays of light issue from the image of the Virgin; the  
clock strikes twelve.*)

The troll! The troll!—Begone, unclean spirit! (*The  
cat disappears.*) And now! (*Opens the shutters.*) Out into  
life! (*Turns the ring.*) To the verge of the forest! (*He  
leaps out through the open shutters.*)

## ACT II

### IN THE FOREST

*A forest in snow: in the foreground across the scene an icebound brook. Dawn.*

#### SCENE I

*(PETER enters. The wind is blowing in the tree-tops.)*

PETER. So this is the verge of the forest, to which my thoughts have so often flown through the clear air, and this is the forest! – And this is snow! Now I will make snowballs as I have seen the schoolboys do. It looks as if it would be such splendid fun!

*(He makes snowballs and throws some of them.)*

Well! H'm! It is not so wonderful after all! Once more! . . . I think it's rather dull. . . . But what's that playing up there in the tree-tops? The wind! – Yes, that sounds rather nice! Sough! Sough! Sough! Sough! But it makes you sleepy to listen to it long. Sough! Sough! Sough! Sough! Now it sounds like gnats on a summer evening! It is strange how short-lived everything is out here in nature! The tedium in the tower was long, very long. But things are not at all pleasant or amusing! *(Catches sight of the brook.)* What's this? Ice! What fun can I get from that? Oh! Now I remember, you can slide on it! I must try!

*(He goes out on to the brook; the ice breaks, he falls down in a fright and remains lying.)*

# LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

## SCENE 2

(LISA enters.)

LISA (*runs up to PETER*). There he is! Oh! – He is asleep! – What's this? (*Picks up the ring that PETER has lost when he fell.*) A ring! He is asleep in the snow. What has happened? He has hurt himself. What shall I do? In the midst of the forest and in the midst of the snow; no human being ever comes this way; he will freeze to death if I can't get him away. The good fairy sent me to look for this boy, but she didn't tell me that I should find him half-dead in a snowdrift. If only it were summer and the sun were shining on the green grass. (*She fingers the ring.*)

## SCENE 3

(TRANSFORMATION. *The landscape changes from winter to summer; the ice on the brook disappears and the water runs between the stones; the sun shines over all.*)

LISA. Oh! What's this?

(*She looks round her on every side amazed. PETER awakens.*)

PETER (*rubbing his eyes*). What's this? – I fly out through the tower window, come into a snowy forest, throw snowballs, slide on the ice, knock my head on it, lose my senses – and then I wake up and it is summer! Have I been lying here under the snow for six months? No, it doesn't look like it. (*He looks at himself in the brook.*) I am as red as a rose. (*Bends over the water.*) But what do I see down there in the depths? A blue sky, green trees, white water-lilies and in the midst of them all – a girl! Just like the one round whose



## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

waist the young man put his arm at the Christmas party; flowing hair; lips like a song; eyes like a dove's. — Oh! She nods to me — I'm coming, I'm coming!

*(He is about to throw himself into the brook, when LISA utters a cry.)*

Here! And a moment ago down there!

LISA. Yes indeed! Do not always believe your eyes!

PETER. A strange world, this! But let me see, is it the same girl? *(Looks at her.)* Yes, it is! *(Is about to run up to her, when he catches sight of his ring.)* What, my ring! You have robbed me whilst I was lying unconscious! Oh, do not always believe your eyes, you said! No! Now I have my first lesson! I would embrace an angel and I find a thief.

LISA. Do not always believe your eyes, Peter! Enquire before you judge.

PETER. You're right, I will! Girl, who are you? What's your name?

LISA. My name is Lisa. Who I am you mustn't know till the time is ripe. I came here and found you unconscious, on the ice. I found your ring, of whose power I was not aware.

PETER. You have saved me from certain death in the cold. Forgive me! Lisa, you must come with me on my wanderings and you will have a merry life!

LISA. On your wanderings, you say! What's the goal of your wanderings?

PETER. The goal? Like everybody else, I seek — happiness!

LISA. You seek happiness! That is a frail thing!

PETER. Oh, don't talk like that; I can have anything

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

I like, you know. Haven't we a most lovely summer in the middle of winter? Just look how beautifully the sun is shining up there in the pines; all this is quite new to me, I tell you! Oh, look! What is this? (*Picks up some pine-cones.*)

LISA. That is the fruit of the trees.

PETER. Then they are good to eat!

LISA. No, but children like to play with them.

PETER. Play! I have never done that! Shall we play, Lisa?

LISA. Yes, but what? Shall we play tig?

PETER. How do you play it?

LISA. Just like this! (*She runs behind a tree and throws pine-cones at PETER.*) Now catch me!

PETER (*runs after her*). That's not so easy! (*Steps on a pine-cone and hurts his foot.*) Curse those pine-pears!

LISA. Don't curse the fruit of the trees.

PETER. We can do without such fruits! Then give me those I saw on the Christmas tree! If only this pine-tree could bear such fruits . . .

(TRANSFORMATION. *The pine tree bears oranges.*)

Look! Look! Let us taste! (*They pluck some fruit and eat it.*)

LISA. Well, what do you think?

PETER. They are quite good, but not as good as I expected.

LISA. It's always like that all through life.

PETER. How wise you are, my dear girl! Lisa, may I put my arm round your waist?

(*A bird begins to sing softly up in the pine.*)

LISA. Yes, but why do you want to do so?

PETER. May I kiss you, too?

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

LISA. Yes, I suppose there's no harm in that!

*(They kiss. The bird sings louder.)*

PETER. I am so hot after our game. Lisa, shall we bathe in the brook?

LISA. Bathe? *(She puts her hands before her eyes.)*

PETER *(throws off his coat)*. Yes!

LISA *(hides behind a tree; the bird sings)*. No! No! No!

PETER. Who is that noisy screecher up in the tree?

LISA. It's a bird singing.

PETER. What is he singing about?

LISA. Hush! I understand the songs of the birds—my godmother taught me.

PETER. Oh! It will be fun to hear.

*(The bird sings.)*

LISA. 'Not so . . . not so,' it said just now!

*(The bird sings again.)*

Peter! Peter! Do you know what it said now?

PETER. No!

LISA. 'Live in innocence, my eye sees you!'

PETER. Innocence! What is that?

LISA. I don't know, but . . . put on your coat!

PETER. But surely nobody can see us here, that's nonsense!

*(The cuckoo calls, 'I do! I do! I do!')*

What is that fellow calling now?

LISA *(imitates the cuckoo)*. 'I do! I do! I do!'

PETER. Dear me, what a frightful lot of fuss.

LISA. Can't you enjoy the great innocent joy of nature?

PETER. Yes, for a little! Ugh! What is that? *(Pulls off his waistcoat.)*

# LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

## SCENE 4

(TRANSFORMATION. *A magnificent hall. Servants carry in a table with food and wine; other servants carry in a chest of gold; others again a table full of wine-jugs, vases, goblets, candelabras, etc., of gold. PETER walks about, looking around him.*)

PETER. So this is the rich man's house! Yes, it looks rather promising! Slaves! Bring me my best Sunday coat! But it must be of gold! (*The servants clothe him in a coat of gold.*) A chair! (*They place him in a golden chair before the table.*) Now, Peter, you are going to enjoy life, and you have a right to. Have you not been up at four in the morning to ring the bells for matins? Haven't you swept the church every Friday and scrubbed the steps on Saturdays? Haven't you eaten bread and herrings 365 days in the year and washed them down with cold water? Haven't you slept on pea-straw that has often been so badly threshed that you have felt the peas under your knees? Yes, you have! So enjoy yourself now! (*Is about to sit down at the table.*)

THE MAJOR-DOMO (*with a staff*). Pardon, your Grace, but the table is not yet laid!

PETER. Not laid?

MAJOR-DOMO. The joints will not be ready for a few hours!

PETER. I don't care about the joints!

MAJOR-DOMO (*places himself in front of PETER with his staff*). No, this must not be. You cannot sit down to a table that is not laid!

PETER. Who is to forbid me in my own house?

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

MAJOR-DOMO. Etiquette, your Grace, does not permit it on any condition.

PETER. Etiquette! What sort of a rascal is he?

MAJOR-DOMO. Your Grace. Listen to an old man's words! He who is in your Grace's position and breaks the laws of etiquette is lost!

PETER (*alarmed*). What a strict fellow! But I suppose I must submit, though I am awfully hungry! But wait – Will nothing make any impression on him? I have heard that – gold – (*Goes to the treasure-chest and takes up a handful.*) Wouldn't . . . ?

MAJOR-DOMO. Your Grace! I stand above the servants; Your Grace stands above me, but above us all stands etiquette! Its laws are eternal, because they are founded both on reason and on what is called historical precedents!

PETER. And the historical precedents are not to be got round with gold?

MAJOR-DOMO. They are incorruptible in this case!

PETER. Then what's the use of all my riches if I may not eat my fill when I'm hungry? I am worse off than the poorest bell-ringer!

(*The MAJOR-DOMO takes his place like a statue at the end of the table.*)

### SCENE 5

(*The TAX-COLLECTOR and his ASSISTANTS go about making notes of everything in the room.*)

PETER. Here is another plague! In what way do you gentlemen intend to torture me, poor innocent?

TAX-COLLECTOR. Taxation, your Grace!

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

PETER. So it is you who regulate human values! At what value do you assess a man nowadays?

TAX-COLLECTOR. Two per cent, your Grace. Otherwise according to what he is worth!

PETER. Look here, can't I withdraw while you gentlemen make your notes, because I am both tired and hungry!

TAX-COLLECTOR. Impossible! It must be done in the presence of the owner.

PETER. Oh God! What worries! But may I not at least sit down?

TAX-COLLECTOR. Please do! (*To his assistants*). Two dozen plates with moulded edges – note that! Six wine coolers with handles of superior yellow metal – note that! A sugar-basin with sugar-sifter – and two smaller ditto – note that! Two dozen knives with mother-of-pearl handles – brand new – note that!

PETER. I'm sure I'm going mad!

TAX-COLLECTOR. One oak dining-table with double leaves! Six walnut chairs!

### SCENE 6

(*The ADVOCATE. The Former.*)

PETER. Yet another!

ADVOCATE. Your Grace is summoned to appear at the town-hall in order to certify certificate of land registration No. 2867 before twelve o'clock this day.

PETER. The Town Hall! Lawsuits! I never go to law, Sir!

ADVOCATE. There is no question of an action, but only of testifying to facts.

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

PETER. I don't want to testify to any facts.

ADVOCATE. But take the case . . .

PETER. I don't want to take any case, I want to dine! Major-Domo, may I not have a sandwich?

*(The MAJOR-DOMO raises his staff threateningly.)*

### SCENE 7

*(An USHER of the Court. The Former.)*

PETER. Are there still more?

USHER. Your Grace is summoned before the Magistrate at eleven o'clock this morning for neglecting to keep the street clean.

PETER. Must I keep the street clean, I, who am such a rich man? What is there I haven't got to do?

USHER. It is the duty of every householder to keep the street outside his house clean.

PETER. Etiquette, taxes, taking the case, keeping house and street clean, hunger and thirst – if that is the lot of the rich man, then I had rather be a street-sweeper. And I can't send away these men who crowd into my rooms, and I can't go my own way when I want to!

### SCENE 8

*(A PETITIONER, followed by a servant, carrying two baskets with papers. The Former.)*

PETER. Mr. Advocate and Mr. Usher, can the law not protect an unhappy rich man so that he may have peace in his own home, or is the law only for the poor?

ADVOCATE. Your Grace is not to be regarded as a

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

private person, for when a man has risen by his wealth to the heights of society, he belongs to the community.

PETER. And is thus placed outside the law.

ADVOCATE (*smiles, looks round*). Above the law, your Grace!

PETER. Aha! What does this last fellow want? Has he some presents in his baskets?

PETITIONER. Your Grace in the capacity of church-warden is . . .

PETER. Summoned . . .

PETITIONER. Summoned to a meeting the day after to-morrow . . .

PETER. At eleven o'clock . . .

PETITIONER. At eleven o'clock, to be present at the election of the pastor of the congregation, but before that Your Grace must peruse the documents I have here, which purpose to prove that the rival candidate is ineligible for election.

PETER. Am I to read through two baskets of papers by the day after to-morrow! — No! No!

PETITIONER. Perhaps your Grace will be pleased to give his vote for our candidate anyhow . . .

PETER. Without the necessity of reading . . . will that do? Thanks, my dear friend! Pen and ink! (*Gives him ink, pen and paper for signature.*) Splendid!

PETITIONER. I thank your Grace!

PETER (*embraces him*). Oh! It is I who have to thank you!

MAJOR-DOMO (*strikes the table with his staff. A servant enters with a dish*). Dinner is served!

(*All except the MAJOR-DOMO go out.*)



## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

PETER (*sits down at the table*). At last. (*Faint music.*) Look, they go away when he commands, but when I ask for anything it does not help.

MAJOR-DOMO. It is not my commands they obey, your Grace, it is the laws of etiquette.

PETER. And they override my wishes.

MAJOR-DOMO. Law is a matter of common consent, and it must surely override the will of the individual.

PETER. He has an answer for everything! – Well, now I'm going to enjoy myself. Wine warms the heart, food warms the head, but what pleasure is there in enjoying good things in solitude? Mr. Major-Domo, do the laws of etiquette permit me to have company when I am enjoying myself?

MAJOR-DOMO. I think they almost require something of the kind.

PETER. Very well, I want . . .

### SCENE 9

(*The FIRST FRIEND leaps into PETER's arms.*)

FIRST FRIEND. Ah! My dear, dear friend, I see you again after so long an absence! And you are not changed, a little thinner than when I saw you last, but how are you now, my dear old fellow?

PETER (*looks at him steadily*). Thanks, thanks, very well, as . . . h'm . . . you see. Please take a chair and sit down.

FIRST FRIEND. By all means! I have just had dinner, but I will go into your drawing-room and wait till you have finished your meal.

PETER. No, that's exactly what you must not do. I

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

said a moment ago that I thought life so dreary when one has to sit down to table alone. Draw up a chair and sit down!

FIRST FRIEND. My dear old friend, if you expressly insist on it, I will sit down beside you while you eat; but it will look just as if I had come here to get a meal. . . .

PETER. It doesn't matter if it does. . . .

FIRST FRIEND (*shocked*). Oh!

PETER. Well, well! But I didn't say it was so.

FIRST FRIEND (*sits down*). I see you have fallen on your feet, as they say; it's pleasant to see that fate *can* be so kind, and it must always gladden a sensitive soul that good luck should come to *somebody*. It is not everybody – Heaven knows! – who can praise fickle fortune.

PETER. Indeed! Have you any grievance?

FIRST FRIEND. I?

PETER. Yes, but I don't want to hear of misfortunes when I'm eating! Will you do me the favour of trying some grouse?

FIRST FRIEND. If you ask a favour, my friend.

PETER. You must not say 'my friend'; you must call me by my name.

FIRST FRIEND. Christopher! You ask a favour of me, my poor fellow! Can I refuse you?

(*He begins eating and his appetite grows during the following dialogue; PETER begins to look at him with wide-open eyes.*)

PETER. We must never refuse each other anything!

FIRST FRIEND. That is well said; we must never refuse ourselves – I mean each other – anything!

# LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

## SCENE 10

(*The SECOND FRIEND. The Former.*)

SECOND FRIEND (*enters and goes straight to the table*).  
How do you do, Göran? – Do you recognize me?

(PETER *stares at him.*)

No, you don't, but I recognize you! You see, I don't forget my old friends, and in time of need I look them up. Here you sit eating and I have nothing to eat, and so I say straight out: 'Here you have me, Göran.' (*Sits down at the table.*)

FIRST FRIEND (*to PETER*). What sort of a rascal is that? He eats as if he had not seen any food between Christmas and Easter!

PETER. Oh, he's a good friend!

SECOND FRIEND (*to PETER*). What sort of beggar is that? He tucks in like a wolf in early spring!

PETER. Oh, he's a good friend of mine!

FIRST FRIEND (*to PETER*). Beware of false friends, Peter.

SECOND FRIEND (*to PETER*). Beware of false friends, Peter.

PETER. Yes, yes.

FIRST FRIEND (*to PETER*). You wait, he's come to borrow money from you.

SECOND FRIEND (*to PETER*). If he asks you to lend him money, refuse, because he never pays back.

PETER. I see, I see! – Well, my friends, don't you think this is excellent fare?

SECOND FRIEND. I never flatter.

FIRST FRIEND. No, you only eat, my friend! I never flatter either, but all the same I can't conceal the truth, and I must confess that I have never seen anything

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

like it, and to think that it is Christopher who provides such a feast! Your health, brother Christopher!

PETER (*amazed, aside*). Christopher!

SECOND FRIEND. I am a plain ordinary fellow, I am, and I cannot make such fine speeches. I despise them, and when they are made in such quarters I can only attribute them to a secret wish to get money. That is my plain, every-day opinion.

FIRST FRIEND. What insolence!

PETER. I must beg that this enjoyable meeting be not disturbed by any serious conversation, and I think it might be even more pleasant if it were graced by some charming member of the opposite sex.

### SCENE II

(*The LADY FRIEND. The Former.*)

PETER. Behold!

LADY FRIEND. So you couldn't wait for me! That was very impolite, but I forgive you, since you are my friend. Here is my hand!

PETER (*kisses it*). I ask your pardon, fair lady, but I must have mistaken the day! However, please sit down. My friends, will one of you make room at my side?

(*The FRIENDS press closer to him.*)

Neither of you! Well, let him who is my youngest friend move! But perhaps you don't know which is! Very well, let him who is my best friend voluntarily give up his place, for he is always near to my heart in any case!

(*Both FRIENDS leave their places.*)

I see you are both my best friends!

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

LADY FRIEND. And I am your best lady friend, am I not, Alonzo?

PETER. Quite right! — And now I raise my cup and drink to friendship! Friendship is like gold, for it is pure.

LADY FRIEND (*to the two FRIENDS*). How beautifully he speaks!

PETER. Friendship is like the moon.

LADY FRIEND }  
TWO FRIENDS } Bravo! Bravo!

PETER. For it borrows its gold . . .

(*The three FRIENDS look at each other.*)

from the sun! And it darkens when the sun departs. Isn't that so?

THREE FRIENDS (*morosely*). Very well said!

PETER. But friendship is a fire; it must be fed if it is to continue to burn! You have given me your friendship; what have I given to you?

(*The LADY FRIEND and the other FRIENDS look round.*)

You look at my gold. Ah! That is only dross compared with your friendship!

LADY FRIEND (*guardedly*). But we should not despise earthly things because there are also things not of earth.

TWO MALE FRIENDS. Excellently said!

PETER. Very well, I will reward your loyalty. Look, I will give you all this gold!

THREE FRIENDS. Oh! (*They fall upon the table service.*)

PETER. But remember, I told you gold was nothing but dross! (*He holds his hand to his mouth and walks*

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

*uneasily up and down.*) Oh, my God! – I think I am dying!

LADY FRIEND. What's the matter with you, Alonzo?

PETER. I've got toothache! Oh! My teeth! You see, even a rich man is exposed to life's discomforts!

*(The three FRIENDS move towards the door with their articles of gold.)*

No, don't leave me alone in my pain, now when I most need your company!

FIRST FRIEND. Oh, a little toothache isn't very serious; it will soon go!

SECOND FRIEND. Take some cold water in your mouth and it will soon pass!

LADY FRIEND. Yes, you men, you are so sensitive to small ailments; you should see how a woman can suffer!

PETER. Oh, don't leave me, I am suffering terribly!

FIRST FRIEND. I will never forsake you! *(With his hand on the door.)* I will run for the dentist.

PETER. No, stay here!

SECOND FRIEND *(at the door)*. No, as George's oldest friend, that falls to me!

PETER. You want to run away from me! Very well! I curse the gold! I curse you, false friends! *(The gold articles which the three FRIENDS hold in their hands are transformed and become black.)*

THREE FRIENDS. He has cheated us! Look! Look! *(All three are seized with toothache and cry out with pain.)* Oh! Oh!

PETER *(recovered)*. Oh! It's only a little toothache, it will soon go! Take some cold water in your mouth, old fellow, and it will soon pass. *(The LADY FRIEND faints.)* Surely a woman doesn't faint for such trivial pains!

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

(*The two men FRIENDS rush out.*) That's right, run to the dentist and let him pull out all your teeth, you foxes; you'll not bite any sheep then!

### SCENE I 2

(*The LADY FRIEND, PETER.*)

LADY FRIEND (*regaining consciousness*). Alfred! They have all deserted you, but I shall remain with you!

PETER. Well, and why shouldn't you! I am as poor as the poorest, and soon the tax-collector will come and demand his taxes, and then he will take all the furniture in pledge!

LADY FRIEND (*snuggles up to him*). Then I will be by your side and help you. (*She takes his hand and during the following dialogue steals his ring.*) And lend you a hand . . .

PETER (*duped*). You! Is it really true?

LADY FRIEND. Is it true? – Look at me . . .

PETER. Ah! They told me that women were more faithless than men. . . .

LADY FRIEND. They are wiser than men . . . (*Puts the ring on her finger.*) That's why they call them faithless. . . . Oh! – let me sit down, I am so agitated.

(*He leads her to a chair by the wall.*)

PETER. Be calm, my friend, I was only frightening you!

LADY FRIEND. Give me a glass of wine, I am so exhausted after all these excitements!

(*PETER goes to the table; the wall behind the chair opens, the LADY FRIEND and the chair vanish.*)

(*Holds the ring*). Ha! Ha! Ha! Schoolboy! Learn by this not to trust the woman you have insulted!

# LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

## SCENE 13

(PETER alone. *Rushes to the window and looks out; when he withdraws his head he has donkey's ears.*)

PETER. A curse on gold, friendship and women! Now I stand alone, poor and deserted, with two long ears and without my ring! Had I known that life was so thoroughly rotten, I should certainly have stayed at home with the troll! What shall I do now, without friends, without money, without a house and without a roof? Want stands outside the door and waits for me. Shall I now in earnest go out into life and achieve all my wishes by work? If only I were not alone! . . . But why not be glad to be alone, since friendship does not exist and everything is falsehood and vanity? A curse on it!

## SCENE 14

(LISA enters. PETER.)

LISA. Do not curse, Peter!

PETER. Lisa! You don't desert me, though I forgot you in my days of prosperity.

LISA. It is in times of need that we find our friends!

PETER. Friends! I curse friendship!

LISA. You mustn't do that, Peter! There is friendship in life as well as there are false friends.

PETER. I have now tried the good things of life and I have found only emptiness and vanity.

LISA. You have tried them in your own way! Meanwhile you have learned the first lesson of youth, and now it is for you to become a man! You have sought happiness in the wrong places. Won't you go forth and



## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

do good, enlighten your fellow men and be useful? For your healthy eyes see through the perverted and the distorted in life.

PETER. And be a great man!

LISA. Great or small, it's all one; but useful you must be. You must be a reformer, leading humanity onward.

PETER. Yes, a reformer, honoured and worshipped by the people, whose name is on everybody's lips.

LISA. Oh! How far you are from the true thing! You seek human greatness for the sake of honours! You shall have them and you shall have a new experience!

PETER. But how? I have lost my ring!

LISA. It is a property of the ring that it can never be parted from its owner.

PETER (*looks at his hand*). Ah! Look, it's there. Very well, I will be a great man, a reformer; but you must come with me, Lisa.

LISA. Not now! But I will follow thee hereafter.  
When sorrow whelms and evil days betide,  
And black clouds veil the sun of light and laughter,  
Lo! I am there to help thee, at thy side.  
Go forth to life! Mark there how evil groweth;  
But when thou see'st how, sprung from mire and mud,  
The flower of beauty ever bloweth,  
Remember then that life is twofold, bad and good.

## ACT III

### A MARKET-PLACE

*To the right the Arcade of the Town Hall; above it a Balcony with seats for the MAYOR and COUNCILLORS; to the left the SHOEMAKER'S house with shop-window and sign, with a bench and table outside; beside it a hen-coop and a water-tub. In the middle of the market-place a PILLORY with two neck-irons, hanging on chains, and on top a figure holding a birch. To the right, in the middle of the market-place, a STATUE of Mayor Hans Schulze with a laurel wreath on his brow. The figure leans on a stamper. In the background a view of the town.*

### SCENE I

*(The PILLORY and the STATUE.)*

PILLORY *(bows to the STATUE)*. Good morning, Statue! Did you sleep well last night?

STATUE *(nods)*. Good morning, Pillory; did you sleep well yourself?

PILLORY. I slept all right, but I dreamt too; can you guess what I dreamt?

STATUE *(testily)*. How should I be able to guess?

PILLORY. Well, I dreamt – can you imagine? – that a reformer had come to the town!

STATUE. A reformer? What! – *(Stamps.)* It's deuced cold for the feet standing here, but what does one not do for honour's sake! A reformer? Well, I suppose he will have a statue too?

PILLORY. Statue! Statue indeed! No! He had to stand here at my feet himself like a statue and I took him by the throat with my two arms! *(The neck-irons*

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

*rattle.*) You see, he was a real reformer and not one of those charlatans you were when you were alive.

STATUE. Oh nonsense! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

PILLORY. I ought to be, but I always have justice on my side. (*Swings the birch.*)

STATUE. What was his specialty?

PILLORY. He was a reformer in street paving.

STATUE. In street paving! Plague and pestilence! So he's dabbling in my province! (*Knocks with the stamper.*)

PILLORY. No, he does effectively what you dabbled in, and you would never stand where you are if you had not been the mayor's father-in-law.

STATUE. Was it not I who carried out the new idea of paving the streets?

PILLORY. Yes, you did, but the idea was not new. And what did you do? Instead of putting their feet, as formerly, on soft sand, people now balance themselves on round and pointed cobbles which destroy both the feet and the shoes, except in the street leading from your house to the tavern, where you had a strip laid with flag-stones!

STATUE. And now this reformer or charlatan wants to undo what I did?

PILLORY. He wants to tear up what you laid down and pave all the streets with mayor's slabs, so that everybody may have it equally good.

STATUE. I see, he is a revolutionary!

PILLORY. Yes, that's it, and he has no party to support him. You had the coach-builder, the shoemaker, the chiropodist and the mayor on your side, and that's why you succeeded!

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

CHIROPODIST. We can begin with the cantata, I think, and then people are sure to come.

COACHBUILDER. But I can't make out the Mayor. Why doesn't he put in an appearance? He always used to give us punch in former years!

SHOEMAKER. Oh, if you begin singing, he will be sure to waken, if he has overslept. — Have you the key, gentlemen — c, f sharp, g, b.

COACHBUILDER. I will begin then! But mind the trio, so that it'll be a really rousing ensemble.

### *Solo Recitative.*

Hail, O Benefactor!

Hail to thee, O Burgomaster!

Though all things mortal be in this dark vale of tears,

Yet memory of thy work, when all else disappears,  
Spite envy and intrigue, shall live throughout the years.

SHOEMAKER. Well piped, Coachbuilder! No sign of that punch yet!

COACHBUILDER. Go on, Shoemaker! Now for the aria. Take it in a proper idealistic way, and you'll see that it will waken the Mayor!

SHOEMAKER.

### *Aria.*

Breath of the roses and scent of carnation-buds mid  
fates of the wonder-blossoms!

Treacherous she

As the tinselled sea

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

As she leaned towards him the crest of her hair –  
And all the life of the sea sings there;  
And lily so white, and lily so red  
Whisper their dreams of the quick and the dead!

CHIROPODIST. That was a fine verse, but I don't think it had any relation to the matter and our present circumstances. Where did you get it?

SHOEMAKER. Well, you see, I have an apprentice at home who is one of those idealist fellows and does that sort of thing in his free time on Sundays.

COACHBUILDER. If I may give my opinion, I think it uncommonly difficult to get at the innermost kernel of the verse.

SHOEMAKER. That's just the fine thing about it, you see! But hush! Didn't you feel the rain? (*Puts on his cape.*)

COACHBUILDER. Do you gentlemen think there is any reason why we should stand out in the rain and get drenched for the sake of that old fogey?

SHOEMAKER. But we have the money to provide the music and we must at least take the trio before we go; if we strike up together surely even the old man will not be able to sleep! But we can drop the oration, and in any case there is too small a public for a big speech. So we'll take the trio! c, f sharp, g, b. It's not so idealistic as the aria, but it displays more acquaintance with the actual facts of the case.

*(The rain patters and the wind rises.)*

CHIROPODIST. I'm hanged if I'm going to stand here any longer and catch cold for the sake of that old

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

charlatan! The fee? Six marks a head! I can dispense with that!

COACHBUILDER. So can I . . .

SHOEMAKER. I suppose you were not a subscriber to the bust; and you took no part in making him a great man, with a medal.

COACHBUILDER. Well, we were all forced to it, weren't we? Else we should have suffered for it.

SHOEMAKER. Yes, but it's ungrateful not to honour his memory. I'll sing the trio alone.

CHIROPODIST. It's all very well for you, you who have a cape, but I'm going home to my breakfast!

*(He throws the wreath on the base of the STATUE, turns up the hood of his cloak, and runs off.)*

COACHBUILDER. This is the last time I'll be seen at such a shindy. Good-day! *(Goes out.)*

### SCENE 3

*(The SHOEMAKER, alone.)*

SHOEMAKER. Now I'm going to the mayor to get some punch. But first I'll make my speech for the old man there, then I shall have a better conscience. *(Addresses the STATUE.)* You believe, my dear Schulze, that it is for *your* sake we sing, for *your* sake we make speeches. Can't you see that it is for our own sakes; we need a great man to put forward when we feel too small ourselves; we need your words to quote, when nobody believes our own; our little town needed a statue to become a big town; your relations who have come down in the world needed your statue to make

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

their way and get jobs in this vexatious world – and that, you see, is why, you old nonentity, you now stand up there above us. Now you have heard a true word, my poor fellow, perhaps the first and the last you'll ever hear. (*Alarmed.*) I hope nobody has been listening to what I said? Aha! There comes the relative of the great man!

### SCENE 4

(*The RELATIVE. The SHOEMAKER.*)

RELATIVE. Good morning, Shoemaker. Have you heard – have you heard of the scandalous attack on us?

SHOEMAKER. What now? What has happened, Mr. Relative?

RELATIVE. A reformer has arrived in the town! Haven't you even read his bill?

SHOEMAKER. No! No!

RELATIVE. Oh! It's unprecedented! Read it yourself!

SHOEMAKER. I am too agitated to read it. Read yourself!

RELATIVE. Well, just listen to what the scoundrel writes:

'Scarcely a quarter of a century has elapsed since Mayor Schulze gratified this community by an important improvement in its streets; he substituted rough cobbles for the former sandy soil.'

Do you hear? Do you hear!

SHOEMAKER. Yes, I do, but surely there's no harm in that?

RELATIVE. No harm? Doesn't he call him Mayor Schulze? One does not talk of a dead man as Mayor:

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

one says 'Our Great Man.' Does not the scoundrel write about rough cobbles! Doesn't he wish to decry his merits by that?

SHOEMAKER. But surely you can't call it an attack to say that the cobbles are rough when they are rough!

RELATIVE. They are rough, yes, but you mustn't say they're rough when a great man made them! Take care, Shoemaker, I see you are a doubter. Take care, you know the consequences!

SHOEMAKER. Good gracious! I'm certainly not a doubter; I've just been singing an idealistic song for brother Schulze.

RELATIVE. Friend! If you were his brother in life, then remember that all pledges of brotherhood are broken by death! Will you not admit that it was an attack?

SHOEMAKER. Of course I will! Have I ever said anything else? Can you prove that I said anything else?

RELATIVE. Very well, be careful! We have a general meeting of the Council here in the market-place at nine o'clock and that reformer fellow will have to defend his scheme. Do you know what he wants?

SHOEMAKER. No!

RELATIVE. Can you imagine it! He wants to pave all the streets again with flat stones!

SHOEMAKER. But that seems rather sensible!

RELATIVE (*laughs bitterly*). Sensible! Sensible indeed! – What will happen, to take only one example, to your wonderful shoemaking business when people no longer wear out their shoes?

SHOEMAKER. What! What do you say? – Forgive me, my friend! You are right! I will not think of my own humble work, but of all the unfortunate workers, who



## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

will lose their daily bread, and of their poor wives and children!

HANS (*makes faces to himself in the window*). Poor unfortunate workers!

RELATIVE. Look at him! Look! Look at him! (*Points to the Statue.*) He was the poor man's friend, he was! And he was a man who knew what he was doing!

SHOEMAKER. You may be sure that the Coachbuilder and the Chiropodist will share my opinion!

RELATIVE. Can I be sure of that?

SHOEMAKER. Absolutely!

RELATIVE. Happy the people that reveres its great men!

(*Runs away.*)

### SCENE 5

(*The Former. PEOPLE. The RELATIVE in conversation with the COACHBUILDER and the CHIROPODIST. The Town Clock strikes nine. Two trumpeters and a drummer enter and strike up. When the music ceases PETER enters. The PAVIOUR joins him.*)

PETER. Good morning, Master Paviour! How do you think things are going for me?

PAVIOUR. Badly! Very badly!

PETER. Don't the people want improvements, then?

PAVIOUR. There's no doubt about that, but it's a question of your attack on the great man's reputation.

PETER. Have I attacked him?

(*The rain has ceased.*)

PAVIOUR. You have called him 'Mayor,' and that has become a term of abuse in this town; you have said

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

that his cobbles are rough; you have, in a word, expressed the general opinion about the man, and for that reason you are done for!

PETER. We do live in a strange world!

PAVIOUR. It's so so, and it has its little peculiarities, but don't try to improve it, sir, else you'll have a devil of a time!

PETER. The people are dissatisfied, and if anybody tries to remove the cause of their discontent, they throw stones at him.

*(A boy thrusts a leaflet into their hands and runs on distributing them among the people. PETER looks at the sheet.)*

Oh! But this is scandalous! They have caricatured us! Have I really such a nose?

PAVIOUR. They have hit us off rather well! But surely I haven't got ears like that?

PETER. But I can't understand it. Yesterday the printer was for us and to-day he abuses me.

PAVIOUR. Public opinion, you see! He told me, too, that he approved the plan, but he dare not defy public opinion.

PETER. A funny way of working for a cause. What does he call public opinion?

PAVIOUR. Firstly, his customers – then the mayor – money and power.

PETER. But why did he caricature you then?

PAVIOUR. Because I supported your proposal: of course I did, because I could make something out of it! Meanwhile, he will sell five hundred of these poems to-day.

*(Trumpets and drum; the MAYOR, the COUNCILLORS and the CLERK come out on to the Balcony.)*

# LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

## SCENE 6

(*The Former. PEOPLE.*)

MAYOR. Well, my children, I suppose you've heard that an impostor has come to the town!

ONE OF THE PEOPLE. He's not an impostor; he's a reformer!

MAYOR. Well, that comes to the same thing! – But you hold your tongue, my lad, you have no vote!

PETER. Mr. Mayor, I would request that my proposal be laid before this honourable assembly as I made it.

MAYOR. Listen to him. We know his proposal, and it only remains for us to say what we think of it. I relegate it, in a word, to the madhouse; imagine, my children, the fellow wants to make us all walk on flat stones! So long as Our Lord creates men differently there must be different kinds of stones on the streets. Is there anybody here who wishes to say more?

ONE OF THE PEOPLE. That's not true! God has not created men differently!

MAYOR. Who gave you permission to shout?

ONE OF THE PEOPLE. If we're not allowed to vote, then at least we can shout!

MAYOR. Well, shout; and I'll send you to the lock-up. Nobody, I am sure, has anything more to say?

RELATIVE. Mr. Mayor, as an honest man I feel bound to protest against the shameful attack which has been made on my kinsman.

PETER. I take exception to the relative.

MAYOR. On the contrary, I attach special importance to his words, because he is related to a great man. That

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

is always the best safeguard for society. . . . So we consider the proposal rejected. (*Strikes with his hammer.*)

THE COCK (*in the hen-coop outside the SHOEMAKER'S*).  
Cock-a-doodle-doo!

MAYOR. What devil's row is that?

ONE OF THE PEOPLE. He has a vote!

THE COCK. Cock-a-doodle-doo!

ONE OF THE PEOPLE. Arrest him! (*Laughter and noise.*)

PETER. Mr. Mayor!

MAYOR. Silence there!—Point two! . . . The said adventurer has spoken scandalously of the Council of this town by making a libellous speech on its late mayor! We must hear what some unprejudiced townsmen have to say. What does Mr. Shoemaker think he deserves?

SHOEMAKER. I vote with the Council.

MAYOR. That's right! We will bear him in mind! What does Mr. Chiropodist say?

CHIROPODIST. Agreed!

MAYOR. And Mr. Coachbuilder?

COACHBUILDER. I have the honour to agree with the previous speaker.

ONE OF THE PEOPLE. Those who have the right to speak are silent!

MAYOR. Silence there!—By reason of the facts brought forward and supported by complete proof, the adventurer Peter (no surname) is hereby sentenced for libellous utterances against the Council to stand for two hours in the pillory and then to be expelled from the town, as a lesson to him and a warning to others.

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

PETER. Mr. Mayor, there is no proof!

MAYOR. None required! Axioms and self-evident propositions neither can nor need be proved! Take him away. (PETER is led off.)

Point three: In consideration of the circumstances, both painful and unforeseen, that the dogs of the town give inappropriate expression to their innate sense for what is unseemly round the base of the statue to the departed friend of humanity, Hans Schulze, a vote is requested for an iron railing round the same. There is surely nobody who will deny such a small token of esteem to so meritorious a man!

VOTERS. No!

ONE OF THE PEOPLE. That was the first time the voters have been heard to say 'No'!

MAYOR. Put him in the lock-up, constable. The question is answered, then, in the affirmative.

VOTERS. Yes!

ONE OF THE PEOPLE (*imitating a sheep*). Ba-a-a-a. . . .

(*Laughter and disturbance for a moment.*)

MAYOR. The Common Council is adjourned.

(*Trumpets and drum, then silence on the stage.*)

RELATIVE (*to the SHOEMAKER*). He's an uncommonly firm and energetic official, that Mayor of ours!

SHOEMAKER. He ought to be in the Government, and then the public business would move a little faster!

(*The MAYOR, the COUNCIL and the CLERK go into the Town Hall.*)

# LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

## SCENE 7

(PEOPLE *continue to walk about in the market-place. The SHOEMAKER, the CHIROPODIST, the COACHBUILDER, the RELATIVE. The PAVIOUR keeps out of the way.*)

SHOEMAKER (*to the others*). Will you come in and have a glass of beer with me, gentlemen?

CHIROPODIST  
COACHBUILDER  
RELATIVE } Thank you!

SHOEMAKER (*gives orders through the door; HANS brings out beer*). Well, Mr. Relative, it did not please you to attend your great townsman's celebration this morning?

RELATIVE. No, why should I go out in the rain! You were there with the Society.

SHOEMAKER. The whole Society! We were three all told!

RELATIVE. And did you sing?

CHIROPODIST. Yes, a little!

RELATIVE (*laughs*). Were there many people?

COACHBUILDER. Not a soul!

RELATIVE. And the Mayor?

SHOEMAKER. Overslept himself!

RELATIVE (*laughs*). Have you read the *Morning Cock*?

ALL. No!

RELATIVE (*takes up a sheet*). Then listen! — 'Homage. The usual homage, which the Schulze Society arranges for the honoured citizen whose monument has been erected in the town market-place, took place this morning in the presence of an immense crowd, which greeted with loud applause the songs in commemoration of the great departed. The songs were executed by the

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

mighty chorus with its usual precision and good ensemble. The speech of the day, which was more than usually elaborate, was delivered in a sonorous voice by our esteemed master shoemaker Pumpenblock. Among the distinguished persons present were to be seen the Mayor, the Relative of the deceased and many others.'

*(All laugh.)*

Isn't that good?

ALL. Oh! It's priceless! You wrote it, eh?

RELATIVE. H'm! have you seen the portraits of the reformer and the Paviour! They are really capital!

SHOEMAKER. But wasn't it going a bit far to caricature them like that?

RELATIVE. Well, of course no sensible person can have anything against the proposal, but to think that it has got into such hands. Hush! Here he comes.

### SCENE 8

*(The Former. PETER is brought in by the Watch and placed in the neck-irons of the pillory. The people gather and point at him. The SHOEMAKER's company becomes somewhat embarrassed. A MAN WITH A BARREL ORGAN, and a BLIND OLD WOMAN, with a painted picture on a pole, enter.)*

*(THE OLD WOMAN sings and points at the picture, which is painted in six panels, one for each verse.)*

There lived a poor young stripling  
Who sought the people's weal.  
In the market sat the nobles  
Idly, and quaffed their ale.

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

'I make,' quoth he to the people,  
'Your highways smooth and plain.'  
But the nobles spake together,  
'This youth shall prove our bane.'

In the market sat the nobles  
Idly, and quaffed their ale;  
They drank to the good of the people,  
They drank to the common weal.

In the pillory stands the stripling –  
Such doom upon him falls;  
In the coachmaker's yard the cock crows,  
As erst in Caiaphas' halls.

And the noble lords they cherish  
Their laws and their mastery,  
And with statues and rails of iron  
Safeguard their memory.

But in bondage lie the people –  
'Shall the long night ne'er be past?'  
They wait till the cockcrow soundeth  
For the third time – and the last!

*(The SHOEMAKER's company make wry faces and pretend not to listen. The people are interested and drop coppers into the OLD WOMAN's box. The women are moved to tears and dry their eyes now and then.)*

RELATIVE (*to the SHOEMAKER*). Well, have you many orders nowadays?

SHOEMAKER. Oh, so so!

OLD WOMAN (*advances to the table*). Give a copper to a blind old woman!



## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

CHIROPODIST. You mustn't go about begging! Don't you know that?

ONE OF THE PEOPLE. She isn't begging, she's asking for payment.

SHOEMAKER. What nonsense is he talking?

ONE OF THE PEOPLE. The Schulze Society is remunerated for singing for the statue there, but they put the money in their pockets and don't do it! This morning there were only three there.

SHOEMAKER (*to his companions*). Fancy they know about everything – the rabble!

OLD WOMAN. Give an old woman a copper!

RELATIVE. And must we pay for her bawling too!

ONE OF THE PEOPLE. She sang better than the shoemaker sang this morning; we stood round the corner and listened to him. It's true she doesn't sing idealistic stuff about carnations and wild roses, but a true word in the right place is also idealism.

RELATIVE. If the old woman doesn't go, she'll be sent to the lock-up!

(*Thunder, rain and wind. Commotion.*)

SHOEMAKER. There now, it's raining again! Please come inside, gentlemen. (*They break up.*)

OLD WOMAN. Must that poor wretch stay out there in the rain in the pillory?

RELATIVE. If my kinsman, who is such a great man, must stay out, then he too can stay where he is!

SHOEMAKER. It cools down these reformers nicely to get a little cold water over them. (*Stumbles and knocks his*

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

*toes against the cobbles.) Those cursed cobblestones!"*  
*(Hops into the house on one leg.)*

*(All go out except PETER and the OLD WOMAN.)*

### SCENE 9

*(PETER and the OLD WOMAN (LISA).)*

THE OLD WOMAN *(lays aside her mask)*. Well, Peter! Now you have become a famous man; your name is on everybody's lips; your picture is being carried round all the streets and market-places and the people praise you as a reformer. Are you satisfied?

PETER. Yes, Lisa, I have had my fill of being a reformer.

LISA. Do you intend to leave your work half-finished?

PETER. Good Lord, yes, if only I can get out of this with a whole skin!

LISA. You sought honour and glory.

PETER. Well, so does everybody.

LISA. Not everybody! – but you had the approval of the people!

PETER. The people! They have no voice in the matter!

LISA. You wanted the approval of the great; well, then stay where you are and be ashamed of yourself! . . . You didn't even believe in the cause you fought for!

PETER. Honestly, I think it's pretty much the same whether we walk on flat stones or rough ones.

LISA. Yes, when you walk in calf-skin boots, but not when you walk barefoot.

PETER. Besides, society is not worth lifting a finger

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

for—it's nothing but lies right through. The public good, the public good, people never talk of anything else! What is the public good after all. It seems to me to be the sum total of the good of a few individuals.

LISA. It ought to be the good of all, but it isn't; make it so and it will be. But you are not the right man to do it.

PETER. I want to, I really do, but I haven't the power.

LISA. Then get the power, Peter, and let us see if I have been mistaken.

PETER (*breaks his irons and comes down the stage*). You will see, Lisa, I shall do something great when I once have the power.

LISA. Why something great! Something good would be better!

PETER. But you must always be at my side! Lisa, what was it the bird sang in the forest?

LISA. I will tell you later!

PETER. No! now!

LISA. It said: 'I love you.'

PETER. Won't you love me, Lisa?

LISA. Yes, when once you love me.

PETER. I do!

LISA. No, you don't; so far, you only love yourself! Go out again, Peter, and learn. You have not many wishes left! The greatest and the most dangerous is still to come! Power, that is the highest thing a weak mortal can attain; but woe to him who abuses it! He is the world's greatest criminal because he makes a caricature of Our Lord! Farewell, king, your crown awaits you.  
(*Disappears.*)

PETER. And my queen!

## ACT IV

THE INTERIOR OF A PALACE IN ORIENTAL STYLE

*To the right a throne; a table in front of it with the regalia;  
to the left a divan with a semicircle of cushions round it on  
the floor.*

### SCENE I

*(The LORD CHAMBERLAIN and the EARL MARSHAL.)*

*(THE EARL MARSHAL is lying on the floor writing on a  
paper-roll.)*

THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN. Is that the young Caliph's family tree?

EARL MARSHAL. Yes, my Lord Chamberlain.

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. It looks rather imposing! What ancestor have you given him?

EARL MARSHAL. The Caliph Omar, of course!

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. I think Haroun-al-Raschid would have been better!

EARL MARSHAL. It's quite true that he was more popular, but then our gracious lord would not have been related to our ancient house.

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. Quite right! Will you have it ready soon, we expect him any moment!

EARL MARSHAL. Has the Lord Chamberlain seen the new Caliph?

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, he looks like anybody else, it's of course only the family tree that distinguishes him from us.

EARL MARSHAL. Yes, the tree!

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

LORD CHAMBERLAIN (*looks at the family tree again*). You've made it frightfully wide!

EARL MARSHAL. I had to make out a collateral line; it looks very full on paper and gives the family an appearance of strength which is always flattering!

LORD CHAMBERLAIN (*laughing*). What will Caliph Omar say about it?

### SCENE 2

(*The Former. The COURT CHAPLAIN.*)

COURT CHAPLAIN. Allah, Ekbar barai! How are you?

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. Alla, Eloim! Thank you, splendid.

COURT CHAPLAIN. Is the act of renunciation made out in duplicate?

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. In duplicate! Will you kindly collate them, and then all he has to do is to sign.

COURT CHAPLAIN. If we get him to do it, it will certainly be better.

LORD CHAMBERLAIN (*takes two papers from the table in front of the throne and hands one to the COURT CHAPLAIN*).

'We, Omar, the 27th, hereby solemnly renounce the Roman Catholic religion and embrace the Mohammedan doctrine as determined in the Koran and the holy writings.'

Dated, etc.

OMAR

Correct?

COURT CHAPLAIN. Correct!

# LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

## SCENE 3

(*The Former. PETER. The EARL MARSHAL springs up from the floor with the family tree. The VIZIR. The HISTORIOGRAPHER ROYAL stands silent and notes in a book what he hears.*)

VIZIR. May it please your Grace to peruse this family tree of your noble lineage which the Earl Marshal of our realm has prepared.

PETER. My family tree! – I have never known anybody else but my father, the old bellringer.

VIZIR (*pretends not to hear*). It begins with a great and glorious name, the Caliph Omar. . . .

PETER. The Caliph Omar! What queer sort of a fellow was he?

VIZIR (*severely*). He was not a queer fellow, he was a great and glorious ruler. . . .

PETER. Yes, that may be, but I was born in wedlock and not in any collateral line, gentlemen!

VIZIR. It is not fitting for a ruler to be selfish, he must in all respects sacrifice his private interests and tastes to the public welfare!

PETER. Very good! But does the public welfare require me to be illegitimate?

VIZIR. Yes!

PETER. Give it here then!

(*EARL MARSHAL hands him the tree and pen.*)

It begins with a lie; it will end with a theft, I suppose.  
(*Writes.*)

VIZIR. One formality remains! May it please your Grace to sign this paper.

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

(*The COURT CHAPLAIN produces the act of renunciation.*)

PETER. What is this now?

VIZIR. Your Grace need not trouble to read it; it's only a matter of form!

PETER (*reads*). Renounce my father's faith! But isn't that outrageous!

VIZIR. Considerations of policy, the public weal. . . .

PETER. I am to become a Mohammedan, and never drink a glass of wine?

VIZIR. There are surrogates in all politics. . . .

PETER. What sort of things are they?

VIZIR. Compromises, modifications. . . .

PETER. Circumventions? Eh?

VIZIR. Will it please your Grace to sign?

PETER. But I shall end by despising myself if I begin with so mean an action, and the people will have more right than ever to despise me.

VIZIR. The people demand that the ruler shall sacrifice all personal interests for its weal.

PETER. And its weal is to be built upon a lie and a crime?

VIZIR (*goes to the window*). Your Grace! The people await their Prince! They are always ready to sacrifice their sweat and blood for their Prince, but they demand that their ruler shall in return also make sacrifices.

PETER. Is that true? - Very well, give it here. (*He takes the paper and hesitates.*) The church-tower, the bells, the choir, the lights, Christmas: all pass before my eyes. No more Christmas Eve! Life is cruel indeed! Always demanding, but never giving.

VIZIR. Your Grace, the people are murmuring. They

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

wish to see their Prince in the ancient robes of the Caliphs! Crown and sceptre await again a descendant of the renowned dynasty.

PETER (*sees the crown and sceptre*). Ah! . . . Vizir! Who can command me to renounce my faith?

VIZIR. The law.

PETER. Who made the law?

VIZIR. Our forefathers.

PETER. They were weak men like ourselves! Very well, I will remake the law.

VIZIR. The Caliph does not remake the law, for our constitution does not give him legislative power.

PETER. What is the constitution of this country?

VIZIR. It is a constitutional despotism!

PETER. Answer me! Am I Caliph or am I not?

VIZIR. You will be as soon as you have signed.

PETER. Then give me the paper. (*Signs. Coronation ceremony, court retinue, dancing, etc.*)

PEOPLE OUTSIDE. Long live Omar the twenty-seventh! Allah! Allah! Allah!

VIZIR. May it now please your Magnificence to ascend the throne and begin your reign!

PETER. This will be quite amusing! Let the people enter.

VIZIR. The people? The people have nothing to do with the government!

PETER. But surely I must have somebody to rule over?

VIZIR. That is done in writing! (*Produces some documents.*)

PETER. Go on, then!

VIZIR. In order to relieve your Magnificence of the



## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

heavy burdens of government during the first days, we have tabled all the business except one item, which, however, can very easily be dispatched.

PETER. That was stupid of you, but it can't be helped! Let me hear it!

VIZIR. The Sheik Achmed petitions with his face in the dust from the depth of his heart for permission to embrace the Sunnitic faith.

PETER. What is the Sunnitic faith?

VIZIR. It is a sect, a dangerous sect.

PETER. In what respects does it differ from the pure . . . h'm! . . . faith?

VIZIR. A true Mussulman greets Allah in this manner. (*Crosses his hands over his breast.*) But a sectarian does it this way. (*Pinches his nose and puts his fingers in his ears.*)

PETER (*laughs*). Well, can't the fellow be allowed to put his fingers in his ears?

VIZIR. No, the law of the land forbids it.

PETER. So there is no religious liberty?

VIZIR. Yes, for the true faith.

PETER. But the others?

VIZIR. There are no others.

PETER. Then I will grant them religious liberty!

VIZIR. The Caliph cannot do that.

PETER. Then who can?

VIZIR. Only the government.

PETER. Who is the government?

(*The vizir and all present lay a finger on their lips.*)

A secret?

VIZIR. It is the secret of constitutional despotism.

PETER. But I had liberty to change my religion?

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

VIZIR. That's another matter; policy! . . .

PETER. Heaven protect mankind from policy, then! Am I to begin my reign by refusing a reasonable petition?

VIZIR. Your Magnificence cannot begin better than by fortifying the law of the land.

PETER. But I will never sign!

VIZIR. It isn't necessary! The government will do it! The Council is adjourned. May it please your Magnificence to lay aside your robes and return to private life with its little diversions! Lord Chamberlain, do your duty! (*Goes out.*)

(*The LORD CHAMBERLAIN removes the CALIPH'S crown and sceptre and leads him to the divan.*)

### SCENE 4

(*The Former. Dancers and singers. The COURT POET.*)

PETER. What sort of company is this?

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. This is the court.

PETER. Why have they such short dresses? I don't like the fashion at all!

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. It is the custom of the land, your Magnificence.

PETER. So at any rate it's not policy?

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. The court singer begs leave to entertain your Magnificence with an idealistic song, composed by the famous court poet, Timur-Lenk.

PETER. Be good enough to amuse me, then!

PRIMA DONNA (*sings to the lute*). Bid Horaire their farewell! The troops are on the move.  
Have you, poor soul, the strength to say farewell?

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

PETER. Where's the rhyme?

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. There's no rhyme in this poetry.

PETER. That's bad! Continue!

EARL MARSHAL (*aside to the HISTORIOGRAPHER ROYAL*).  
He won't grow old at this job.

PRIMA DONNA. Your Magnificence will forgive me,  
but I don't feel disposed to-day.

PETER. Lord Chamberlain! Is there anything called  
the bastinado in the constitution?

(*Panic.*)

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. Of course . . . there is. . . .  
But . . .

PETER (*to the PRIMA DONNA*). Continue, then!

PRIMA DONNA (*sings*). Snow-white forehead, shining  
tresses, glittering teeth; and like a steed  
Lame of hoof, behold her tripping delicately through  
the mire.

PETER. Mire? I don't like filth in poetry! Go on!

PRIMA DONNA (*sings*). Full of breast and slender-  
waisted, pregnant though she be anew:  
Have a care when thou dost clasp her — she is like to  
split in two.

PETER. Oh!

PRIMA DONNA (*sings*). Happy he who finely mannered,  
saturate in luscious scents,  
Linked in rapturous embraces shares her couch some  
chilly hour.

PETER. That's enough! Who is the author? The  
author!

POET LAUREATE. Your Magnificence! I have not  
learnt to flatter.

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

PETER. Haven't you! You are a bad court poet! Let us hear your strophe then, and we shall see if you lie!

POET LAUREATE. Your Magnificence! I can never call in question . . .

PETER. Don't chatter! Recite it off!

POET LAUREATE. Lost is the soul of a man when the flame of love's ardour hath caught him,  
Ne'er to awaken again, enthralled by those magical glances

Nay, but *my* love I leave to the hinds . . .

PETER. Pardon! What did you say?

POET LAUREATE (*annoyed*). Nay, but my love I leave to the hinds, while I sing of a princeling  
Great-souled, noble of birth, free-handed, unsullied by baseness;

He who hath conquered the great of the earth when the peril was highest,  
Strong in the one true faith, that scourge by the heretic dreaded.

PETER (*springs to his feet*). Is that true? Are you serious or are you joking?

POET LAUREATE. Serious, Your Magnificence! How otherwise . . .

PETER. I see! You seriously praise my base actions.

POET LAUREATE. Your Magnificence stands as high above base actions as the sun over a dirty pool!

PETER. I know you and your crowd, counterfeiter! You call me, who have renounced my faith, the defender of the faith; you say that I, a bellringer's son, am of noble birth; that I, who rejected the first petition placed before me when I ascended the throne, am generous!

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

I know you, for you are to be found all over the world; you live for thought, and believe in eternity, you say; but you are never to be found when a new thought is born, you are never to be seen when a question for eternity has to be decided; but amidst well-laid tables, in the sunshine of prosperity and power, you swarm like fat houseflies and then fly away and mark with black spots those who are willing to die both for a thought and for eternity. Out of my sight, liars, I would have your heads cut off if I did not see a glimpse of purpose in your existence: a poor prince is forced from 'considerations of policy' to commit so many bad actions that he would die of shame if he had not people like you continually to dull his conscience. Go! I wish to be alone!

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. Your Magnificence! That cannot be!

PETER. It shall be!

*(All go out except the HISTORIOGRAPHER ROYAL.)*

### SCENE 5

*(PETER. The HISTORIOGRAPHER ROYAL.)*

PETER. What are you waiting for? What are you doing?

HISTORIOGRAPHER ROYAL. I am writing your Magnificence's history.

PETER. Ah, you are the Court Historiographer!

HISTORIOGRAPHER ROYAL. The State . . .

PETER. That's the same thing. But what will you write about? I haven't made any war!

HISTORIOGRAPHER ROYAL. That's just what I wanted to speak about. Your Magnificence need only turn to the Minister of War . . .

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

PETER. And he will arrange it! That's his job. And he gets twenty thousand sequins for it!

HISTORIOGRAPHER ROYAL. It is the people, your Magnificence, who . . .

PETER. Wage wars, the ministers of war arrange them, and we sit at home and have the glory – never the shame.

### SCENE 6

*(The Former. The VIZIR.)*

VIZIR. The Bride is waiting!

PETER. The Bride? Who? Where? What do you mean?

VIZIR. Your Magnificence's consort!

PETER. Lisa! Then she loves me in spite of all my faults! Bring her in! She will bring the fresh air of the forests into these musty halls!

VIZIR. Your Magnificence must first be pleased to sign the marriage contract.

PETER. Everlasting signing! Well, this time I need not read it! *(Signs.)* Well, Historiographer, can you discover one single action in my life which was not a crime?

*(The VIZIR and the HISTORIOGRAPHER go out.)*

### SCENE 7

*(PETER. The BRIDE is led in amidst singing and dancing, veiled in oriental manner; the attendants immediately retire, soft music off the stage.)*

PETER *(runs to the bride)*. Lisa! Lisa! You always

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

come like a sunbeam when there are clouds, always like a friend in the hour of darkness.

BRIDE (*raises her veil*). My name is not Lisa.

PETER. What does this mean? Not Lisa? Treachery! Who are you then?

BRIDE. Your consort!

PETER. My consort?

BRIDE (*coldly*). The government had three candidates for you: the Vizir's choice fell on me, because my father threatened you with a tariff treaty.

PETER. Government candidates, tariff treaties! What does this mean?

BRIDE. Policy demands that princes shall sacrifice their personal interests for the weal of the people!

PETER. Policy demands! Does the weal of the people demand any princes at all then?

BRIDE. I don't know! . . . But so things are! And now you are my consort. Please be happy about it, otherwise you will be unhappy . . .

PETER. Are you happy?

BRIDE. I am nothing.

PETER. Do you love me?

BRIDE. No, indeed not! – Do you love me?

PETER. No!

BRIDE. You love your Lisa?

PETER. And you your . . .

BRIDE. Ali!

PETER. Oh, woe and misery!

BRIDE. Calm yourself for a moment! Just a moment while they come and congratulate us! The wedding procession is waiting outside! Hush! The procession approaches! Place yourself by my side.

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

PETER. Shall I play the hypocrite again?

BRIDE. Obey me, I am a wise woman! When they have gone, I will tell you my plan. Now they are coming! Look happy, my consort, or else they will say I have made you unhappy!

PETER. Oh, my dear, dear old father! How right you were! Black is black, and never will be white!

*(PETER and the BRIDE sit on the divan and look tenderly at each other.)*

### SCENE 8

*(A CHOIR OF SINGERS. A TROOP OF DANCERS. The LORD CHAMBERLAIN. The HISTORIOGRAPHER ROYAL. The VIZIR.)*

CHOIR *(sings)*. How blest that youthful twain  
Such happiness to gain;  
Nightingales and roses, singing,  
Set these lofty halls a-ringing,  
Where Caliphs dwelt of old  
Their praises shall be told.

*(PETER and the BRIDE conceal their emotion.)*

VIZIR. A happy people, which you see assembled here at the foot of the throne, Caliph, rejoices when it sees happiness radiating like a sun from thine eyes and shining upon the white rose which long has sought the lofty oak for support; a happy people, young princess rejoices in your happiness and hopes that you may shoot forth branches with new rosebuds, which will one day spread joy and happiness over land and realm like spring rain.



## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

PETER (*leaps up and draws his sword; the BRIDE seeks in vain to calm him*). Fires of Hell! You Grand Vizir of lies! – Are you my people, dressed up adventurers! Are these hired girls, with their venial ways, my people, who bear the burden of taxes for us that we may refuse their most reasonable requests! No! I have never seen my people! Is this young woman, whom you have placed by my side, a consort, who loves me? No, she is a heifer that you have dragged into my stable; she is grafted on to the family tree that she may have offshoots; she is a government candidate, who will bless her husband with a tariff treaty. You call us happy because we have to be so! But we are profoundly miserable, for we are on the threshold of a crime, though one which we shall never commit! I curse you, palace consecrated as a temple of lies; to the dust with you, false family tree!

*(The family tree falls down from the wall and rolls up on the ground.)*

You broken fragments, crown and sceptre, symbols of violence!

*(The crown and sceptre fall down.)*

Crash, throne, seat of injustice! (*The throne collapses. Thunder and storm.*) Disperse like chaff, you fortune-hunters and prostitutes, who have placed yourselves between ruler and people! (*The Court disperses. All vanish. To the BRIDE.*) You lamb of sacrifice, be free as I am myself! Now I will go out into nature among my people and see if there does not still exist some honesty and honour.

# LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

*(The BRIDE vanishes; PETER remains standing with his hands before his eyes until the change of scene has taken place.)*

## TABLEAU

*(On the seashore. Foreground: the beach with fragments of wreckage thrown up; to the left a small flat rowing boat drawn up, and fishing tackle; the hulk of a wrecked vessel. In the background: open sea; gulls sail over the waves. To the right: cliffs crowned with pine woods; below them a hut.)*

## SCENE 9

PETER. Where am I? My breath comes more freely. All evil thoughts flee! There is a perfume as of old sagas; I hear a murmur coming from afar, the earth beneath my feet is soft like a bed! Ah! It is the seashore.

O glorious Sea, mother of mother Earth!  
I hail thee from this worn-out withered heart,  
Now newly 'neath thy moisture-laden winds  
Swept clean and cooled.  
The tang of thy salt waves has been for me  
The bath of health, and healing for the wounds  
Wrought by the lies and follies of the world.  
Blow, wind, and fill with thy pure gusts  
My breast so long fed on its poisoned fumes.  
Sing, waves, and let mine ear delight  
In harmonies of thy pure tones,  
Here 'mid the wreckage strewn along the strand,  
Myself a wreck, cast up upon the sand  
When the ship crashed upon the rocky towers!  
Hail to thee, Sea, nurse of new thoughts and powers,

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

Souls in their worn-out frames to life awakening,  
When waves are loosened each returning Spring,  
And gulls and terns sport through the sunny hours,  
Courage and hope and joy of life to bring!

(*Sees the hut.*) What's that? A human habitation! Not even here am I granted a little rest! Curses!

A VOICE. Curse not!

(*It grows dark and the sea begins to swell; it rises towards him during the following dialogue, so that he is forced back towards the footlights.*)

PETER. Who was that? (*He is about to flee into the wings on the left, but is met by elks.*) Wild beasts stop me! (*He would flee to the right, but bulls stop him.*) Here too! Back! (*The beasts advance on to the stage and press in on him.*) They surround me! Help! (*Rushes to the hut and knocks.*) Is there no living soul here? Help! Help! (*He is about to throw himself into the sea, but serpents and dragons rise up out of the waves.*) Ha! nature, you too are a wild beast, who would devour all you can master! You, my last friend, have betrayed me too! . . . What sights of horror! The ocean will devour me! What more is my life worth; come, death, and set me free!

(*The sea gradually calms down.*)

### SCENE IO

(PETER. DEATH. *The wild beasts vanish.*)

DEATH. Here I am, at your service. What do you want of me?

(PETER *terrified, but recovers.*)

PETER. Ah! I see! It was nothing particularly pressing!

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

DEATH. You called me!

PETER. Did I really? Yes, it was only a manner of speech we have. I really don't want anything from you!

DEATH. But I want something from *you*! Stand up straight on your legs while I shear. It will be over in a flash! (*Lifts his scythe.*)

PETER. Mercy! Mercy! I don't want to die!

DEATH. Nonsense! What has life to offer to you, who have no wishes left?

PETER. I'm not sure. Perhaps, if I think a little . . .

DEATH. Oh! You have had plenty of time, now it's too late! Straight up now, that you may fall like a real despiser of the world. (*Lifts his scythe.*)

PETER. No, no! For God's sake, wait a moment! . . .

DEATH. You are a poor creature! Live, then, if you think there is still something left to live for, but don't repent afterwards! For I shall not return for a long time! (*Is about to go.*)

PETER. No, no, no, don't leave me alone . . .

DEATH. Alone! But you have the beauty of nature!

PETER. Yes, that's all very well when it's fine weather and the sun shines, but when it's . . .

DEATH. You see, you can't live without your fellow-creatures after all! Knock three times on the door over there and you will find company! (*Vanishes.*)

### SCENE II

(*PETER knocks three times on the door of the hut. The WISE MAN comes out.*)

WISE MAN. Whom do you seek?

PETER. A human being; that's all. I am unhappy!

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

WISE MAN. Then you must not seek human beings; they can never help you!

PETER. I know, but I want neither to live nor to die; I have endured every suffering and my heart will not break.

WISE MAN. You are young and you do not know the human heart! I have just been reflecting here on the causes of man's misery; would you like to see what the little thing they call a human heart looks like? (*He goes into the hut and comes out again with a casket and a lantern, which he hangs on the branch of a tree.*) You see this little three-cornered muscle which has now ceased to move; it once throbbed with anger, beat with joy, was crushed by sorrow and swelled with hope; you see, it is divided into two large chambers; in the one dwells good, and in the other evil; in other words, a devil sits on one side of the wall and an angel on the other. When they quarrel with each other, which happens often enough, then there is discord in the man, and he thinks that his heart will break, but it doesn't, because the walls are thick; yes indeed; look here, look at the thousand small pin-pricks; they have not gone through, but the sting remains all the same! (*He is silent.*)

PETER. Whose heart was that, Wise Man?

WISE MAN. The unhappiest of mortals.

PETER. Who was he?

WISE MAN. He was a man. . . . Do you see the marks of a heel, do you see the nails? It was a woman who trampled on his heart for twenty-six years!

PETER. And he did not grow weary?

WISE MAN. Yes, he did grow weary one Christmas Eve; and he freed himself from her. As a punishment

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

the powers laid a curse on him! He cannot die, though his heart is taken from him.

PETER. And can he never be delivered from the spell?

WISE MAN. When his son has found a faithful woman and brought her home as his bride, then the spell will be broken. But that can never be, for his son is gone for ever.

PETER. Whither did he go?

WISE MAN. He went out into the world!

PETER. Then why can he never find a bride, poor boy?

WISE MAN. Because he who only loves himself can never love another!

PETER. It's the Old Man! My father! Lisa, it is you!

*(The WISE MAN sinks through the floor. The hut vanishes.)*

### SCENE 12

*(PETER alone. Day breaks.)*

PETER. Gone! It was the Old Man! 'He who only loves himself'! That's what Lisa said too! – But I hate myself, I despise myself for the mean things I have done – and I love Lisa! I love her, I love her!

*(The sun shines over the waves and falls on the pine woods on the right. The clouds in the sky disperse, a boat is seen out at sea; it approaches during the following scene. When it comes near, LISA is seen sitting at the rudder; she waves her hand to PETER and the boat goes on.)*

You gulls in the air, say it to her! You sunbeams, bear

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

my words in your arrows of fire and carry them to her!  
But where shall I seek you? Where?

*(The boat is visible for a moment on the horizon.)*

There she is! Now ring, fulfil my last wish and take me to her. The ring is gone! Alas, what does this mean? Is my life-story at an end, or is it perhaps just going to begin? Lisa, beloved of my heart! *(He runs up the hill and waves.)* If you hear me, answer; if you see me, give a sign! – Oh, she turns seaward. So be it! Storm and sea, who separate me from my heart's love, I challenge you to battle for the highest prize! *(He pushes out a boat which is drawn up on the beach.)* Blow, you winds, and rock, you waves! My frail keel will cleave you like a sword. Out, my boat! even if our goal escapes us, let us fight until we sink.

## ACT V

### THE COUNTRY CHURCH

*A little wooden country church with a painted roof; in the background the altar with crucifix; to the left the pulpit; on a pillar in the first wing on the left a statue of ST. BARTHOLOMEW with his skin in his hand; on the corresponding pillar on the right ST. LAURENCE with his grid; the BROOM leans against the altar rail to the left; a BIER to the right of the altar; two rows of hassocks to right and left form a passage from the foreground to the altar; to the right in the foreground a confessional; to the left in the first wing an iron door.*

### SCENE I

*(The HOBGOBLIN in one of the church windows. The FAIRY in the other.)*

HOBGOBLIN. It was not the old man who ate up the porridge; it was the rats.

FAIRY. So it was not to do Peter good, but to do the Old Man harm, that you sent him out into the world!

HOBGOBLIN. Even we immortals can make mistakes! Let us make good our error!

FAIRY. If it is not too late!

HOBGOBLIN. What do you mean?

FAIRY. Peter is a hater of men and cannot reconcile himself with life.

HOBGOBLIN. Lisa will put that right again and then the Old Man's crime will be atoned for. We must mend where we have torn.

FAIRY. I have already made my preparations.

HOBGOBLIN. Here?



## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

FAIRY. Here, in this very place, the floor of which we may not tread.

HOBGOBLIN. And why not? It is holy ground, and we are not allowed to take part in the great reconciliation because . . . something which we must not know intervened. But that does not prevent men from believing some good of us; and they are right, for there are two sides to everything! – But I shall not be absent, even though I may not be present, and I will see that this reconciliation does come about, for even we, unblessed spirits, can rejoice in the happiness of others. Farewell for the present!

FAIRY. Farewell.

*(The HOBGOBLIN and the FAIRY vanish.)*

### SCENE 2

*(LISA enters.)*

LISA. The good fairy promised that I should meet him here in this quiet church! . . . How shall I find him? Has he learnt from life, or is he still the same selfish, pleasure-seeking youth pursuing only fleeting happiness? If he had the strength to do a bad action for a good cause, he ought at least to have shown that he could make a sacrifice for something other than himself, and the most we can give for a cause is our dear regard for ourselves; and that the higher powers demand; they choose the instruments where they please and nobody may refuse the call, even if he perish. *My* friend was not like that; and therefore . . . hush! I hear footsteps! It is he! No, I will not meet him yet! I must collect my thoughts! If I hide myself here . . . in the confessional. . . . *(Hides herself in the confessional.)*

# LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

## SCENE 3

(PETER enters.)

PETER (*falls down on a hassock to the left down the stage*). She flees from me as I flee from my evil thoughts! Alone, abandoned, what more can I now do in life? I have only learnt the nothingness of life and I have no wishes left but evil ones. My soul would be as empty as a shell if it were not filled with her! My life! Yes, what has it been after all? (*The BIER stamps on the floor.*) What was that? . . . A ghost in the sunlight! That would be amusing! (*The BROOM stamps on the floor.*) Again! . . . They say that one can see a ghost by broad daylight if one looks through a crack in the door; they even say that one can see *oneself*! Oneself! If that were possible, how easy it would be to avoid one's worst faults! . . . I will try. (*Throws open the door on the left and stands behind it.*)

## SCENE 4

(PETER'S SHADOW goes up into the pulpit. It drinks from the glass of water and turns the hour-glass. PETER himself remains by the door and turns his back to the audience.)

THE SHADOW. My beloved listeners! (*The BIER, the BROOM, ST. BARTHOLOMEW and ST. LAURENCE stir.*) My beloved listeners, and you, Peter, behind the door, my sermon will not be long, since the hour is already late, and it is especially to this so-called Lucky Peter that I wish to address some words. Yes, Peter, you have run through life like a fool in pursuit of happiness; all your wishes have been fulfilled, except one, and they have

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

brought you no joy. Listen, you behind the door! It's not life you have run through at all, for its path is plain enough; all you believe you have lived through has been only dreams. For, believe me, one does not get one's wishes by wishing-rings in the real world. One gets nothing here except by work. Do you know what work is? No! It is something very toilsome, but it *must* be toilsome, and rest is the sweeter. Work, Peter, and be honest, but do not be a saint, for then you will become arrogant and it is not our virtues but our faults that make us men! Listen, Peter, you behind the door! Life is not as you saw it in the dreams of your youth; it is a desert, it is true, but a desert which has flowers; it is a stormy sea, but it has its ports on green islands. . . . Listen, Peter. If you are now going out into life to be a man, be one in all earnestness; but you will never become a real man without a woman! Find her! And now listen, you Peter; I will call upon St. Laurence, now that I have dismissed you and your youthful dreams with the eternally young and eternally old admonition of the Wise Man, 'Know thyself!' . . . I call on St. Laurence.

(*The SHADOW vanishes.*)

### SCENE 5

(*The Former, except the SHADOW.*)

ST. LAURENCE (*shows his grid*). I am the holy Laurence of the grid, who by command of the Emperor Decius was beaten with rods for seven days in succession and then roasted on this grid over a slow fire! There is none who has suffered so much as I.

ST. BARTHOLOMEW. That's nothing to talk about! ]

## LUCKY PETER'S TRAVELS

am the holy Bartholomew of the skin, who by command of the Emperor Pamphilus was flayed alive right down to the knees. And what miracles were not done after my death? Perhaps you have never heard of the riddles, or the devil in woman's shape, and the miracle of the volcano?

ST. LAURENCE. What is that to talk about, compared with me? I have six miracles, the beam in the church, the crystal chalice, the nun's corpse . . .

THE BIER (*rises on its hind legs*). Oh, enough boasting of your sufferings! I am only a bier, but for fifty years I have borne so many corpses on my back and seen so much suffering, so many crushed hopes, so much hopeless grief, so many torn hearts which had suffered in silence, which were thrust into oblivion and never had gilded busts, that you would keep silent if you had seen half of them. Oh! Life is so black, so black, so black!

THE BROOM (*stamps on the floor and shakes its bristles*). What are you prating about life, you old bier? You who have only seen death! Life is black on one side and white on the other! I am only a broom to-day, but yesterday I stood in the forest, slender and trim and with the desire to be something great; everybody, you see, wants to be great, and then things turned out as they did. Now I do think that things are best as they are. When you can't be great you put up with something else; there are so many things to choose from; one can be useful, and at worst one can content oneself with being good. And if one has not two legs, one can be happy all the same and hop on one.

(*The BROOM scuttles round and then leans on the altar.*)

## THE FATHER

PASTOR. So you want me to preach to him! And what sort of impression do you think God's Word is likely to make on a trooper?

CAPTAIN. Well, brother, certainly none on me, as you know . . .

PASTOR. I do indeed!

CAPTAIN. But him! – well, try anyhow!

### SCENE 2

(*The Former. NÖJD.*)

CAPTAIN. What have you been up to now, Nöjd?

NÖJD. God save you, Captain, but I can't tell you – not while the Pastor's here!

PASTOR. Don't be shy, my lad!

CAPTAIN. Confess now, or you know what'll happen!

NÖJD. Well, you see, it was like this – you see we went to a dance at Gabriel's, and then, and then, you see, Ludvig said . . .

CAPTAIN. What's Ludvig got to do with it? Stick to the truth!

NÖJD. Well, and then Emma says, 'Let's go into the barn,' she says . . .

CAPTAIN. I see. I suppose it was Emma led you astray?

NÖJD. Well, it wasn't far off it! And this I must say, if the girl isn't willing, nothing don't ever come of it.

CAPTAIN. Once for all – are you the child's father or are you not?

NÖJD. How should I know?

CAPTAIN. What do you mean? Can't you tell that?

NÖJD. No, you see, one never can tell that!

## THE FATHER

CAPTAIN. Weren't you the only one then?

NÖJD. Yes, that time, but one can't tell if one was the only one for all that!

CAPTAIN. Do you want to put the blame on Ludvig, then? Is that your idea?

NÖJD. It ain't easy to know who to put the blame on!

CAPTAIN. That's all very well, but you promised Emma you'd marry her.

NÖJD. Well, you see one always has to say that . . .

CAPTAIN (*to the PASTOR*). This is terrible!

PASTOR. It's the old story! Come now, Nöjd! Surely you're man enough to know if you're the father or not?

NÖJD. Well, I was at it, of course, but then you know well enough yourself, Pastor, it needn't come to anything for all that!

PASTOR. Look here, my lad! We're talking about you now! Surely you don't want to leave the girl alone with the child! You can't be compelled to marry her, I suppose, but you *shall* provide for the child! That you shall do!

NÖJD. Well then, Ludvig must too!

CAPTAIN. Then the case must go before the court. I can't get at the truth of it, and really it doesn't interest me either. Now be off!

PASTOR. One moment, Nöjd! H'm! Don't you think it's dishonourable to leave a girl destitute like that with a child? Don't you think so? What? Don't you think that sort of behaviour . . . h'm – h'm! . . .

NÖJD. Well, you see, if I only knew I was the child's father – but you see, Pastor, one never can know that! And then going about all one's life slaving for other

## THE FATHER

people's children – well, it's not much fun! Surely you and the Captain can see that for yourselves!

CAPTAIN. Be off!

NÖJD. God bless you, Captain! (*Goes out.*)

CAPTAIN. And keep out of the kitchen now, you ruffian!

### SCENE 3

(*The CAPTAIN and the PASTOR.*)

CAPTAIN. Well, why didn't you give it him?

PASTOR. Well, and didn't I give it him?

CAPTAIN. Oh, you only sat there mumbling to yourself!

PASTOR. To tell the truth, I don't know what to say. I'm sorry for the girl: yes, and I'm sorry for the boy too. Besides, suppose he were not the father! The girl can nurse the child four months at the orphanage, after which it's provided for for the rest of its life. But the boy can't do any nursing – he can't! The girl can get a good place afterwards in some respectable family; but the boy's future may be ruined if he gets dismissed from the regiment.

CAPTAIN. Upon my soul, I shouldn't care to be in the magistrate's shoes to settle this case. Probably the boy isn't quite innocent – one can't tell. But one thing we can tell, and that is that the girl is guilty – if there's any guilt in the matter at all!

PASTOR. Yes – well, I judge no man! – But what was it we were talking about when this blessed business interrupted us? Bertha's confirmation, wasn't it?

CAPTAIN. Well, not really so much her confirmation as her general education. Here we've got a house-full of

## THE FATHER

women, all of whom want to educate my child. My mother-in-law wants to make her a spiritualist; Laura wants her to be an artist; the governess would like to turn her into a Methodist; old Margaret to a Baptist, and the maids to a Salvation Army lass. Of course it's no good trying to make up a soul in patches like that: especially as I, who have the best claim to guide her natural instincts, am continually opposed in my efforts. So I must get her away from here.

PASTOR. You have too many women running your house for you!

CAPTAIN. I have, haven't I? It's like going into a cage full of tigers: if I didn't keep my irons red-hot under their noses they might tear me to pieces any moment! Oh yes, you laugh, you old ruffian! It wasn't enough that I married your sister, but you go and palm off your old stepmother on me as well!

PASTOR. But, good heavens! One can't have step-mothers in one's house!

CAPTAIN. No, but as you can't put up with them, you prefer to put them up as mothers-in-law in other people's houses!

PASTOR. Ah, well! we all have our crosses to bear!

CAPTAIN. Yes, but I seem to have more than my share! Then there's my old nurse too, treating me as if I were still wearing a bib. A good old soul, to be sure! but she's no business here!

PASTOR. You should keep your women-folk in order, brother! You let them run things far too much!

CAPTAIN. Will my brother enlighten me as to the best way of keeping women in order?

PASTOR. Well, to tell the truth, Laura - she's my



## THE FATHER

own sister, but still – she always was a bit of a hand-full!

CAPTAIN. Laura has her weak points of course; nothing so very bad though!

PASTOR. Oh, speak out – I know her!

CAPTAIN. She had a romantic upbringing, and finds it is a little difficult to adapt herself. Still she's my wife, and . . .

PASTOR. And because she's your wife she must be the best of women! – No, brother, she's really the one who is most down on you!

CAPTAIN. Anyhow, the whole house is now upside down. Laura won't let Bertha leave her, and I can't have her staying in this madhouse!

PASTOR. Oho! So Laura won't have it? In that case I fear there may be trouble. When she was a child she used to lie like one dead till she got her own way; then as soon as she'd got what she wanted, she used to give it back – supposing it were a thing – with the explanation that it wasn't the *thing* she wanted so much as getting her own way!

CAPTAIN. So she was like that even then! H'm! She really gets into such a temper sometimes that I'm anxious about her, and think she's ill.

PASTOR. But what is it you want to do about Bertha that is so impossible to agree about? Can't you compromise?

CAPTAIN. You mustn't think I want to make her into a prodigy, or into some image of myself. I won't be procurer for my daughter and bring her up exclusively with a view to matrimony; you see, if she didn't get married after all, it would go hard with her. On the

## THE FATHER

other hand, I don't want to start her on some man's career that needs a long course of training, the preparatory work of which might be entirely wasted if she ever should decide to marry.

PASTOR. What is your idea then?

CAPTAIN. I want her to be a teacher. If she doesn't marry she can fend for herself, and is no worse off than those wretched schoolmasters who have to share their earnings with their families. If she marries, she can apply her knowledge to her children's education. Is my reasoning correct?

PASTOR. Perfectly! On the other hand, hasn't she shown such talent for painting that it would be an outrage on nature to suppress it?

CAPTAIN. No! I showed her attempts to an eminent painter, and he said they were merely the sort of thing one learns at school! Then this summer comes along a young jackanapes who knows better, and says the talent shown is simply colossal; so that settled the matter in Laura's favour!

PASTOR. Was he in love with the girl?

CAPTAIN. That of course I take for granted!

PASTOR. Then God be with you, old fellow, for in that case I see no help! But it's all very annoying, and of course Laura has her supporters . . . in there.

CAPTAIN. That you may be sure of! The whole household is already up in arms, and, between ourselves, their side is not quite playing the game!

PASTOR (*rising*). Don't you think I know about that?

CAPTAIN. You know too?

PASTOR. Why not?

CAPTAIN. But the worst of it is, it seems to me as if

## THE FATHER

Bertha's career were being decided in there from motives of spite. They drop hints about men being made to see that a woman can do this and do that. It's man *versus* woman incessantly the whole day long. Must you go now? You'll stay for supper, won't you? We haven't much to give you, but do stay! I suppose you know I'm expecting the new doctor. Have you seen him?

PASTOR. I caught a glimpse of him coming along. He seemed a nice honest sort of man.

CAPTAIN. That's good! Do you think he may take my side?

PASTOR. Who knows! It depends how much he has lived among women.

CAPTAIN. Oh, but won't you stay?

PASTOR. No thank you, my dear fellow! I promised to be in to supper, and the old lady gets so uneasy if I'm late.

CAPTAIN. Uneasy? Angry you mean! – Well, as you please! Let me help you on with your coat.

PASTOR. It's pretty cold to-night, I expect. Thank you! You must look after your health, Adolf. You're looking very nervous!

CAPTAIN. Am I?

PASTOR. Yes; you're not really well.

CAPTAIN. Did Laura put that idea into your head? She's been treating me the last twenty years as if I were at death's door!

PASTOR. Laura? Oh, but – but you make me uneasy! Look after yourself: that's my advice! Good-bye, old man! But wasn't it the confirmation you wanted to talk about?

CAPTAIN. Not at all! That, I assure you, must take

## THE FATHER

its ordinary course at the expense of the official conscience; I am neither a witness to the truth nor a martyr. We've put all that behind us! Good-bye! Remember me to your wife!

PASTOR. Good-bye, brother! Love to Laura!

### SCENE 4

(*The CAPTAIN; afterwards LAURA.*)

CAPTAIN (*opens the bureau and seats himself at the desk to do accounts*). Thirty-four – nine, forty-three – seven, eight, fifty-six.

LAURA (*comes in from the other room*). Would you be so good . . .

CAPTAIN. One moment! – Sixty-six, seventy-one, eighty-four, eighty-nine, ninety-two, a hundred. What is it?

LAURA. I am interrupting you perhaps?

CAPTAIN. Not at all! House-keeping allowance, I suppose?

LAURA. Yes, house-keeping allowance!

CAPTAIN. Put the accounts down there and I'll go through them!

LAURA. Accounts?

CAPTAIN. Yes!

LAURA. Have we got to keep accounts then?

CAPTAIN. Of course we must keep accounts! Our affairs are in a bad way, and if it comes to bankruptcy, accounts must be forthcoming; if not, we are liable to punishment as negligent debtors.

LAURA. If our affairs are in a bad way, that's not my fault!

## THE FATHER

CAPTAIN. That is precisely what the accounts will disclose!

LAURA. If our tenant doesn't pay, *that's* not my fault!

CAPTAIN. Who was it recommended the tenant so warmly? You! Why did you recommend such a – shall we say – careless fellow?

LAURA. And why did you accept such a careless fellow?

CAPTAIN. Why, because I wasn't allowed to eat in peace, sleep in peace, or work in peace till you got him here! *You* wanted to have him because your brother wanted to get rid of him; your mother wanted him because I didn't; the governess wanted him because he was a Methodist, and old Margret because she'd known his grandmother since she was a child! That's why I accepted him! If I hadn't I should be in the madhouse by now, or else in the family vault. However, here's the house-keeping allowance and your pin-money. You can give me the accounts later on.

LAURA (*curtseying*). Thank you so much! By the way, do you keep any account yourself of what you spend *outside* household expenses?

CAPTAIN. That does not concern you!

LAURA. That is true, I suppose: just as my child's education apparently doesn't concern me. Have the gentlemen come to any decision after their evening session?

CAPTAIN. I have already come to my own decision; I had merely therefore to communicate it to the only friend whom the family and I have in common. Bertha is going to live in the town, and leaves in a fortnight.

LAURA. Where is she to stay, if I may ask?

## THE FATHER

CAPTAIN. At the Säfbergs, the Solicitor's people.

LAURA. With that Freethinker?

CAPTAIN. According to the present state of the law children have to be brought up in accordance with the father's beliefs.

LAURA. And the mother has no voice in the matter?

CAPTAIN. None whatever! She has sold her birthright by a legal bargain and surrendered her rights, in return for the husband looking after her children and herself.

LAURA. No rights then, over her own child?

CAPTAIN. Absolutely none! When you've once sold your goods you can't expect to get them back and keep the money too!

LAURA. But supposing both the father and mother had to decide between them . . .

CAPTAIN. What would be the result of that? I want her to live in the town. You want her to live at home. The arithmetical mean would work out at her staying at the railway-station, half-way between the town and her home! That is a knot which cannot be untied, you see!

LAURA. Then it must be cut! What was Nöjd doing in here?

CAPTAIN. That is my professional secret!

LAURA. Which the whole kitchen knows!

CAPTAIN. Good! Then I expect you know it too!

LAURA. Yes, I know it too!

CAPTAIN. And have your judgment ready-made?

LAURA. The law provides for that!

CAPTAIN. The law doesn't say who is the child's father.

LAURA. No, but one can usually tell that.

## THE FATHER

CAPTAIN. Wise people say that is just what one never can tell!

LAURA. How very remarkable! Can't one tell who is a child's father?

CAPTAIN. So they say!

LAURA. Most remarkable! How, then, comes the father to have such rights over a woman's children?

CAPTAIN. He only has them when he undertakes the responsibilities himself, or when they are imposed on him. In married life there is, I imagine, no doubt about the paternity.

LAURA. Can there be no doubt?

CAPTAIN. I hope not!

LAURA. But suppose the wife were unfaithful?

CAPTAIN. There can be no question of that here! Is there anything else you want to ask me about?

LAURA. No, nothing!

CAPTAIN. Then I'll go upstairs to my room. Perhaps you'll let me know when the Doctor comes. (*Shuts the bureau and gets up.*)

LAURA. Very well.

CAPTAIN (*Goes out through papered door on the right*). The moment he arrives! I don't want to be discourteous to him, you understand! (*Goes.*)

LAURA. I understand.

## SCENE 5

(*LAURA alone; she looks at the bank-notes in her hand.*)

MOTHER (*from within*). Laura!

LAURA. Yes!

MOTHER. Is my tea ready?

## THE FATHER

LAURA. That is why it is my painful duty to tell you the whole truth at the very outset.

DOCTOR. Could we not postpone this conversation until I have had the honour of being introduced to the Captain?

LAURA. No, you must hear what I have to say before you see him.

DOCTOR. The matter concerns him then?

LAURA. Yes - my poor dear husband!

DOCTOR. You make me uneasy, Madam. Believe me, I sympathize with you in your misfortune.

LAURA (*taking out her handkerchief*). My husband is not quite right in his mind. Now I have told you everything, and you can form your own judgment later on.

DOCTOR. Surely I misunderstand you! I have read with admiration the Captain's masterly essays on mineralogy, and have seen no signs there of anything but a clear and powerful intellect.

LAURA. Really? Well, I should be delighted if all his relatives should prove to be mistaken!

DOCTOR. Still it is possible that his mentality may be disturbed in other respects. Tell me about it!

LAURA. That's just what we're afraid of too! You see he has the most extraordinary ideas sometimes. As a scientific man of course he has a right to them if they didn't have a disturbing influence on the welfare of his family. For instance, he has an absolute craze for buying everything he possibly can!

DOCTOR. That is suspicious: but what does he buy?

LAURA. Whole cases full of books, which he never reads.



## THE FATHER

LAURA. God knows how I have taught myself to meet his wishes through all these long years of trial! Oh, if you only knew what a life of struggle I have gone through at his side! If you only knew!

DOCTOR. Madam, I am profoundly moved by your misfortune, and I promise to see what can be done. I sympathize with you with all my heart and beg you to rely on me unreservedly. But after what I have heard I must ask one thing of you. Avoid arousing thoughts that make a strong impression on the patient. In a weak brain they are liable to develop rapidly, and may easily turn into monomania or fixed ideas. Do you understand?

LAURA. Then I ought not to arouse his suspicion!

DOCTOR. Precisely! One can make a sick man imagine anything, just because he is so receptive for everything!

LAURA. Ah, I understand — quite so! (*A bell rings within.*) Excuse me; my mother wants to speak to me! Just one moment! . . . Ah, here is Adolf. . . .

### SCENE 6

(*The DOCTOR. The CAPTAIN enters by papered door.*)

CAPTAIN. Ah, so you're here already, Doctor! Delighted to see you!

DOCTOR. Ah, Captain! I am delighted to make the acquaintance of so distinguished a man of science!

CAPTAIN. Oh, hardly that I'm afraid! My military duties don't give me time for any very profound researches; still I fancy I'm on the track of a discovery.

DOCTOR. Indeed?

CAPTAIN. You see, I have been examining the spectra

## THE FATHER

of meteors, and I have found carbon: in other words, traces of organic life! What do you say to that?

DOCTOR. Can you see that in a microscope?

CAPTAIN. Heavens, no! the spectroscope of course!

DOCTOR. Of course; I meant the spectroscope! Then you'll soon be able to tell us what is happening on Jupiter!

CAPTAIN. Not what is happening, but what *has* happened. If only that confounded bookseller in Paris had sent me the books! But I really believe all the book-sellers in the world are in league against me. Just imagine! For two whole months I haven't had a single answer to my orders—nor to my letters and abusive telegrams! It makes me simply mad: I can't make out what it all means!

DOCTOR. Oh, just ordinary carelessness I expect! You shouldn't take it to heart so!

CAPTAIN. Yes, but how the devil am I to get my essay finished in time? You see I know they're working on the same lines in Berlin. However, that wasn't what we were going to talk about! It was about you! If you'd like to live here, we've got a little flat in the wing. Or would you rather live at the old doctor's house?

DOCTOR. Whichever suits you best.

CAPTAIN. No, whichever suits *you* best! Just say!

DOCTOR. You must decide that, Captain.

CAPTAIN. No, I decide nothing! It's for you to say what you want! I have no wishes in the matter—none at all!

DOCTOR. Yes, but I can't make up my mind. . . .

CAPTAIN. For God's sake, man, say what you *want*! I

## THE FATHER

have no wishes, no opinion, no preference of any sort! Surely you can't be such a milksop as not to know what you want! Answer me, or I shall really get angry!

DOCTOR. Since the decision rests with me, I will stay here.

CAPTAIN. Good! Thank you! – Oh! forgive me, Doctor, but nothing annoys me so much as hearing people say 'It's all the same to me!' (*Rings the bell.*)

(*Enter the NURSE.*)

Oh, it's you, Margret! By the by, old lady, do you know if the wing flat has been got ready for the doctor?

NURSE. Yes, Captain, it has.

CAPTAIN. Right! Then I won't keep you up, Doctor; I expect you're tired. Good-bye – till we meet again! To-morrow I hope!

DOCTOR. Good night, Captain!

CAPTAIN. Oh, by the way, I expect my wife has told you something about the state of things here, so you know more or less how the land lies.

DOCTOR. Your excellent wife has given me some hints about one or two things which it may be necessary for an outsider to know. Good night, Captain!

## SCENE 7

(*The CAPTAIN; the NURSE.*)

CAPTAIN. What do you want, old lady? Anything the matter?

NURSE. Now, Master Adolf, just listen!

CAPTAIN. Yes, old Margret: talk away! You're the only one I can listen to without getting mad!

## THE FATHER

NURSE. Now listen to me, Master Adolf! Couldn't you manage to go half-way and settle up with the Mistress about all this bother about the child? Just think of a mother . . .

CAPTAIN. Think of a father, Margret!

NURSE. There, there now! A father's got something besides his child, but a mother has nothing else.

CAPTAIN. Quite so, old lady! she has only one burden, while I have three, and her burden too! Don't you think I should have been something better than an old soldier if I hadn't her and her child?

NURSE. Yes, but that isn't what I wanted to say.

CAPTAIN. I dare say not! You wanted to make out that I was in the wrong!

NURSE. Don't you believe I wish you well, Master Adolf?

CAPTAIN. Yes, old dear, I do believe that; but then you don't know what is 'well' for me! You see, giving the child life isn't enough for me: I want to give her my soul too!

NURSE. Well, you can't expect me to understand that! But I do think you ought to come to some agreement.

CAPTAIN. Margret, you are not my friend!

NURSE. Not your friend? O Lord, what are you saying, Master Adolf? Do you think I could forget you were my child when you were a little boy?

CAPTAIN. And do you think I've forgotten it? You've been like a mother to me: you've stood by me so far when everybody was against me: but now, when it really matters – now you desert me and go over to the enemy!

## THE FATHER

NURSE. The enemy?

CAPTAIN. Yes, the enemy! You know well enough how things are in this house – you who have seen it all from beginning to end.

NURSE. Indeed I have! But, good Lord! why must two people torment the life out of each other? Two people that are so good and kind to everybody else? The mistress is never like that to me or anybody.

...  
CAPTAIN. Only to me – I know that! But I tell you, Margret, if you desert me now, you will be doing wrong! They are weaving a net round me, and that doctor is no friend of mine!

NURSE. Ah, Master Adolf, you believe the worst of everybody, but then that's because you haven't got the true faith! Yes, that's why it is!

CAPTAIN. While you and the Baptists have found the only true faith! Lucky people!

NURSE. Yes, luckier than you, Master Adolf! But bend your heart and you will see how God will make you happy – in love towards your neighbour!

CAPTAIN. Strange that the moment you start talking about God and love your voice becomes hard and your eyes fill with hate! No, Margret, you decidedly have not the true faith!

NURSE. Yes, go on with your pride and the stubbornness of your learning! It won't go far when it comes to the pinch!

CAPTAIN. How proudly thou speakest, O humble heart! I know well enough that learning is no use with such unreasoning animals as you!

NURSE. You ought to be ashamed of yourself! But old

## THE FATHER

Margret—in spite of everything, she likes her great big boy the best; and he'll come back to her sure enough, like a good little boy, when the storms begin!

CAPTAIN. Forgive me, Margret. But believe me—there's no one here who wishes me well but you! Help me! I feel that something is going to happen here! What it is I don't know, but some evil thing is on its way. (*Screams from within.*) What's that! Who is that screaming?

### SCENE 8

(*The Former. BERTHA.*)

BERTHA (*comes in from the other room*). Daddy! Daddy! Help! Save me!

CAPTAIN. What is it, darling? Tell me!

BERTHA. Help me! I'm sure she's trying to hurt me!

CAPTAIN. Who's trying to hurt you? Tell me, quick!

BERTHA. Granny is! It's my fault though. I humbugged her!

CAPTAIN. Go on.

BERTHA. All right. But you mustn't say anything about it. Promise, won't you?

CAPTAIN. Very well; but tell me what it is!

(*The NURSE goes out.*)

BERTHA. Well, you see in the evening she always turns the lamp down and makes me sit at a table holding a pen over a piece of paper. And then she says the spirits are going to write.

## THE FATHER

CAPTAIN. Good heavens! And you never told me this!

BERTHA. I'm sorry, but I didn't dare! Granny says the spirits take revenge on anybody who talks about them. And then the pen writes, but I don't know whether it's me doing it or not. And sometimes it seems to go all right, but sometimes it won't work at all. And when I get tired, nothing comes, but it's got to all the same! And this evening I thought I was doing splendidly, and then Granny said it was all out of Stagnelius and that I'd been fooling her; and then she got most frightfully cross.

CAPTAIN. Do you believe there are such things as spirits?

BERTHA. I don't know.

CAPTAIN. But I know there aren't!

BERTHA. But Daddy, Granny says you don't understand; and she says you do much worse things looking into other planets.

CAPTAIN. She says that, does she? What else does she say?

BERTHA. She says you can't work magic.

CAPTAIN. I never said I could! You know what meteorites are—stones that fall down from other heavenly bodies. I can examine them and say whether they contain the same elements as our earth. That is all I can tell.

BERTHA. Well, but Granny says there are things that she can see and you can't.

CAPTAIN. That's a lie, I tell you!

BERTHA. Granny doesn't tell lies!

CAPTAIN. How do you know?

BERTHA. If she does, Mummy does too!

## THE FATHER

CAPTAIN. H'm!

BERTHA. If you say Mummy tells lies I'll never believe in you again!

CAPTAIN. I didn't say so; you must believe me then when I tell you that your whole future depends on your leaving this house. Are you willing? Will you go and live in town and learn something useful?

BERTHA. Live in town? – I should think I would! Anywhere to get away from here! So long as I can see you sometimes – often! Oh, it's so gloomy and awful in there all the time! Just like a winter night! But when you come in, Daddy, it's just like taking out the inner windows on a spring morning!

CAPTAIN. You dear, darling child!

BERTHA. But Daddy! You must be kind to Mummy, mind! She does cry such a lot.

CAPTAIN. H'm! – So you want to go and live in the town?

BERTHA. Oh, yes, yes!

CAPTAIN. But suppose Mummy doesn't want it?

BERTHA. But she must want it!

CAPTAIN. But suppose she doesn't!

BERTHA. Oh, well, then I don't know what would happen! But she must, she must!

CAPTAIN. Will you ask her?

BERTHA. You must ask her – very nicely! She never bothers about what I say!

CAPTAIN. H'm! – Well now: suppose you want it, and I want it, and she doesn't want it – what's to be done then?

BERTHA. Oh, then the bother begins all over again! Why can't you both . . .



# THE FATHER

## SCENE 9

(*The Former.* LAURA.)

LAURA. Oh, so Bertha is here? Then perhaps we may be allowed to hear her own opinion, since it is the question of her future that has to be decided!

CAPTAIN. The child can hardly have any reasoned opinion as to how a young girl's life is likely to shape itself. We, who have seen so many young girls grow up, should find it easier to form some sort of opinion.

LAURA. But since our opinions differ, perhaps Bertha should be allowed to give the casting vote.

CAPTAIN. No! I allow no one – woman or child – to infringe my rights! Bertha, leave us!

(BERTHA *goes out.*)

LAURA. You were afraid of her giving her opinion, because you thought it would be in my favour!

CAPTAIN. I know that she herself wants to leave home; but I know too that you have the power to alter her wishes whenever you please!

LAURA. Oh? Am I so powerful?

CAPTAIN. Yes; you have a fiendish power for getting your own way; but so has every one who is unscrupulous as to the means. For instance, how did you get rid of Doctor Norling? And how did you get the new doctor here?

LAURA. Well, and how did I?

CAPTAIN. You insulted Norling till he had to go, and you got your brother to canvass for the new one.

LAURA. Well, that was quite simple, and perfectly lawful! – Is Bertha to go then?

## THE FATHER

CAPTAIN. Yes: she starts in a fortnight!

LAURA. Is that your decision?

CAPTAIN. Yes.

LAURA. Have you spoken to Bertha about it?

CAPTAIN. Yes!

LAURA. Then I suppose I must try to stop it!

CAPTAIN. That you can't do.

LAURA. Can I not? Do you imagine that a mother is going to send her child out among wicked people, to be taught that all her mother's teaching is folly, with the result that she is despised by her daughter for the rest of her life?

CAPTAIN. Do you think a father is going to allow ignorant and conceited women to teach his daughter that her father is a charlatan?

LAURA. It wouldn't mean so much to the father.

CAPTAIN. Why not?

LAURA. Because the mother is closer to the child: since the discovery that no one can really tell who a child's father is!

CAPTAIN. But does that apply to this case?

LAURA. You don't know that you are Bertha's father!

CAPTAIN. I don't know?

LAURA. How can you know what no one can know?

CAPTAIN. Are you joking?

LAURA. No: I'm merely applying your own doctrine! Besides, how do you know I have not been unfaithful to you?

CAPTAIN. I can believe most things of you, but not that; nor that you would talk about it if it were true!

LAURA. Assume that I was ready to bear anything: to be cast off, to be despised – anything for the sake of

## THE FATHER

CAPTAIN. Well, some day you'll find you have met your match! and you'll never forget it!

LAURA. That will be interesting!

NURSE (*entering.*) Supper is ready. Won't you please come and have it?

LAURA. Yes, I'm coming.

(*The CAPTAIN stays behind; he sits in an arm-chair by the table at the sofa.*)

Are you coming in to supper?

CAPTAIN. No, thank you. I don't want any.

LAURA. What? Are you cross?

CAPTAIN. No: I'm not hungry.

LAURA. Do come – or they'll be asking . . . unnecessary questions! Be good now! – You won't? Well, sit there then. (*Goes.*)

NURSE. Master Adolf! What's all this about?

CAPTAIN. I really don't know. Can you explain to me how you women manage to treat a full-grown man as if he were a child?

NURSE. I don't really know, but I suppose it's because you're all women's children, every one of you, great and small. . . .

CAPTAIN. While no woman is born of man. True, but then I *am* Bertha's father. You do believe that, Margaret, don't you? – Don't you?

NURSE. Lord! What a silly you are! Why, of course you're your own child's father! Come and have supper now, and don't sit there sulking! There, there! Come along now!

CAPTAIN (*getting up*). Out, woman! To hell with the hags! (*Goes to hall door.*) Svärd! Svärd!

## ACT II

*Same setting as in the previous Act. The lamp on the table is alight. It is night.*

### SCENE I

*(The DOCTOR; LAURA.)*

DOCTOR. From what I could gather from our conversation the case is, in my opinion, not yet fully proved. In the first place, you made a mistake in saying that he arrived at these astonishing conclusions in regard to other celestial bodies by means of a microscope. Now that I have learned that it was a spectroscope, he is not only cleared from all suspicion of mental derangement, he has actually rendered a very great service to science.

LAURA. Oh, but I never said that!

DOCTOR. Madam, I made notes of our conversation, and I remember questioning you on this very point – this very important point – since I thought I must have misheard you. One has to be extremely careful in bringing forward charges concerned with a declaration of incapacity.

LAURA. Declaration of incapacity?

DOCTOR. Yes. You know, I suppose, that an insane person loses his civil and family rights?

LAURA. No, I didn't know that.

DOCTOR. There was one other point which seems to need clearing up. He spoke about his correspondence with booksellers remaining unanswered. May I ask whether – from motives of mistaken kindness – you intercepted it?

## THE FATHER

LAURA. Yes, I did. It was my duty to watch over the interests of the household, and I could not let him ruin us all without interfering.

DOCTOR. Pardon me, but I don't think you can have estimated the consequences of such an act. Should he discover your secret interference in his affairs he will have grounds for his suspiciousness, and after that it will grow like an avalanche. Moreover, by doing this you have set brakes upon his will and still further provoked his impatience. I dare say you have felt yourself what a rent it makes in the soul when one's dearest wishes are opposed, when one's will is thwarted?

LAURA. As if I hadn't felt that!

DOCTOR. Judge then what it must have meant to him!

LAURA (*getting up*). Midnight, and he isn't back yet! We may fear the worst now!

DOCTOR. But tell me, Madam, what actually happened this evening after I left? I ought to know everything.

LAURA. He talked wildly – had extraordinary fancies. This sort of thing, for instance, that he wasn't the father of his own child.

DOCTOR. Strange! What made him think of that?

LAURA. I haven't the least idea: unless it was that he'd been holding an enquiry on one of the men about some question of supporting a child, and when I took the girl's part he got furious and said no one could tell who a child's father was. God knows, I did everything I could to quiet him, but now I believe there is no help! (*Weeps.*)

DOCTOR. But this cannot be allowed to go on! Something must be done, though without arousing his

## THE FATHER

suspicions. Tell me: has the Captain had such delusions before?

LAURA. Six years ago things were in the same state, and then he actually confessed, in his own letter to the doctor, that he feared for his reason.

DOCTOR. Yes, yes. It's a story with deep roots – sanctity of the family life, and so forth. I can't go into everything, but must confine myself to what appears on the surface. What's done can't be undone, unfortunately, and yet the remedy should have been applied to what is done. – Where do you think he is now?

LAURA. I can't imagine. He has such wild ideas nowadays!

DOCTOR. Would you like me to stay up till he comes in? To avoid arousing suspicion I might say your mother was not well and that I had come to see her.

LAURA. Yes, that will do splendidly! Don't leave us, Doctor! If you only knew how anxious I am! – But wouldn't it be better to tell him outright what you think of his condition?

DOCTOR. We never tell a mental patient that, unless he alludes to the subject himself – and then only in exceptional cases. It depends entirely on how the case develops. However, we'd better not stay here; perhaps I may go into the next room: it will look more natural.

LAURA. Yes, that will be best. Then Margret can sit in here. She always stays up when he's out, and she's the only one who has any influence with him. (*Goes towards the door on the left.*) Margret! Margret!

NURSE. Yes, Ma'am? Is the master back?

LAURA. No, but you can sit here and wait up for him.

## THE FATHER

When he comes in, tell him my mother is ill, and that's why the doctor is here.

NURSE. Yes, Ma'am, I'll see to all that!

LAURA (*opens door to inner rooms*). Will you come in here, Doctor?

DOCTOR. Thank you, Madam!

### SCENE 2

(*The NURSE at the table: takes up a hymn-book and her glasses.*)

NURSE. Ah, yes! Ah, yes! (*Reads half-aloud.*)

Ah, what a vile and woeful thing  
Is life – how swiftly fleeth by!  
Death's Angel broods with shadowing wing,  
Through Earth resounds the dreadful cry,  
' 'Tis Vanity – all Vanity!

Ah, yes! Ah, yes!

All that on Earth hath life and breath  
Falls low before his ruthless glaive;  
Sorrow alone escapeth Death,  
To carve upon the yawning grave,  
' 'Tis Vanity – all Vanity!

Ah, yes!

BERTHA (*comes in with a coffee-pot and some embroidery. She speaks in a low voice*). Margret, can I stay up with you? It's so lonely up there!

NURSE. Good gracious, child! Aren't you in bed yet?

BERTHA. No, you see I *must* finish making Daddy's Christmas present. And look! Here's something nice for you!

## THE FATHER

NURSE. Yes, but, dear me! 'This'll never do! It's past twelve, and you've got to be up in the morning!

BERTHA. Oh, what does it matter? I daren't stay up there all alone – I believe there are ghosts about!

NURSE. There now! What did I say? Yes, mark my words, there's no good fairy in *this* house! What sort of things did you hear, Bertha?

BERTHA. Oh, Margret! I heard some one singing up in the attic!

NURSE. In the attic? This time of night?

BERTHA. Yes, and such a sad song too – the saddest I ever heard! And it sounded as if it came from the lumber-room, where the cradle is, you know, on the left. . . .

NURSE. Oh dear, oh dear, and such awful weather to-night! I shouldn't be surprised if the chimneys blow down! – 'What is all our earthly life? – Sorrow, trouble, toil and strife. – Even when it seemed most fair, – Nought but tribulation there.' – Ah, dear child, God send us a happy Christmas!

BERTHA. Margret, is it true Daddy's ill?

NURSE. Yes, I'm afraid he is.

BERTHA. Then we shan't be able to have any Christmas party. But if he's ill, why isn't he in bed?

NURSE. Well, dear, you see the sort of illness he has you don't have to go to bed for. Hush! there's some one out there in the hall. Go to bed now and take the coffee-pot with you, or Daddy'll be angry!

BERTHA (*going out with the tray*). Good night, Margret!

NURSE. Good night, dear! God bless you!



# THE FATHER

## SCENE 3

(*The NURSE; the CAPTAIN.*)

CAPTAIN (*taking off his overcoat*). You up still? Go to bed!  
NURSE. I was only just waiting till . . .

(*The CAPTAIN lights a candle, opens his desk, sits down at it, and takes some letters and newspapers out of his pocket.*)

Master Adolf!

CAPTAIN. What d'you want?

NURSE. The old lady's ill, and the doctor's here.

CAPTAIN. Anything serious?

NURSE. No, I don't think so: just a cold!

CAPTAIN (*getting up*). Who was your child's father, Margret?

NURSE. Oh, how often haven't I told you that! It was that scamp Johansson!

CAPTAIN. You're sure it was he?

NURSE. Oh, but how silly! Of course I'm sure, considering he was the only one!

CAPTAIN. Yes, but was *he* sure he was the only one? No! you might be sure of that, but he couldn't. There's a difference, you see!

NURSE. Well, I can't see any difference!

CAPTAIN. No; you can't see it, but it's there all the same! (*Looks through a photograph album on the table.*) Do you think Bertha's like me? (*Looks at a portrait in the album.*)

NURSE. Of course! You're as like as two peas!

CAPTAIN. Did Johansson admit he was the father?

NURSE. Oh, well, he had to!

CAPTAIN. Terrible! – Oh, here's the Doctor!

# THE FATHER

## SCENE 4

(*The CAPTAIN; the NURSE; the DOCTOR.*)

CAPTAIN. Good evening, Doctor! How's my mother-in-law?

DOCTOR. Oh, it's nothing serious: merely a slight sprain of the left ankle.

CAPTAIN. I thought Margret said it was a cold. Opinions on the subject seem to differ. Go to bed, Margret!

(*The NURSE goes out.*)

(*A pause.*)

Please sit down, Doctor!

DOCTOR (*sitting down*). Thank you!

CAPTAIN. Is it true that if you cross a zebra with a mare you get striped foals?

DOCTOR (*surprised*). Perfectly correct.

CAPTAIN. Is it true that the foals continue to be striped if breeding is continued with a stallion?

DOCTOR. Yes, that is also true.

CAPTAIN. Therefore, under certain conditions, a stallion may be the sire of striped foals, and the reverse?

DOCTOR. Yes — so it seems.

CAPTAIN. That means, resemblance between offspring and father proves nothing?

DOCTOR. Oh . . .

CAPTAIN. That means, paternity cannot be proved!

DOCTOR. Oh, well . . .

CAPTAIN. You're a widower, aren't you? You've had children?

## THE FATHER

DOCTOR. Ye-es . . .

CAPTAIN. Didn't you sometimes feel ridiculous as a father? I know nothing so ludicrous as to see a father leading his child by the hand along the street, or to hear him talk about his children. 'My wife's children,' he ought to say! Did you never realize the false position you were in? Weren't you ever troubled with doubts? - I won't say suspicions, for of course I'm bound to assume that your wife was above suspicion!

DOCTOR. No, as a matter of fact, I never was! Besides, Captain, wasn't it Goethe who said a man must take his children on trust?

CAPTAIN. On trust, where a woman is concerned? Risky, that!

DOCTOR. Oh, there are so many kinds of women!

CAPTAIN. Modern investigations have established the fact that there's only one kind! - When I was young I was strong and - if I may say so - not bad-looking. I remember now just two momentary impressions which later on aroused my suspicions. One day I was on board a steamer, sitting in the saloon with some friends, when up comes the young stewardess, eyes red with weeping, sits down and tells us that her young man has been lost at sea. We condoled with her, and I ordered some champagne. After the second glass I touched her foot: after the fourth her knee; and before morning I had consoled her.

DOCTOR. Just a fly in winter-time!

CAPTAIN. Now for the second - a real summer fly. I was at Lysekil. There was a young married woman staying there with her children, while her husband remained in town. She was a religious woman, extremely

## THE FATHER

strict principles, preached morality to me, and was, I believe, entirely virtuous. I lent her a book – two books – and, oddly enough, when she was leaving she returned them. Three months later, in those very books I came across a visiting-card, and on it a fairly obvious declaration of love. It was innocent – as innocent, that is, as a declaration from a married woman, to a stranger who has never made any advances, can be. Now comes the moral: whatever you do, don't believe too much!

DOCTOR. Nor too little either!

CAPTAIN. No: but just enough! But look here now, Doctor! That woman was, unconsciously, so villainous that she goes and tells her husband of her infatuation for me. That's where the danger lies – the unconsciousness of their instinctive villainy. An extenuating circumstance, no doubt: but it cannot nullify the sentence, only make it lighter.

DOCTOR. Your thoughts are taking a morbid turn, Captain. You should try to control them.

CAPTAIN. You shouldn't use the word 'morbid.' Remember – all steam-boilers burst when the pressure-gauge registers 100, but 100 doesn't mean the same thing for all boilers. Do you understand? However, you are here to watch me. If only I were not a man, I should have the right to make accusations, or complaints – as they are so cunningly called; and perhaps I should be able to give you the entire diagnosis, and what is more, the history of the case. But unfortunately I'm a man: so, like the ancient Roman, there's nothing for me to do but fold my arms across my breast and hold my breath till I die! Good night!

DOCTOR. Captain! If you are ill, it won't reflect on

## THE FATHER

your honour as a man to tell me everything. In fact, I ought to hear both sides.

CAPTAIN. You've had enough of it hearing one side, I expect! You know, when I heard Mrs. Alving making a funeral oration over her dead husband, I thought to myself, what a damned pity the fellow's dead! Do you think he'd have said anything if he'd been alive? And do you think that if any husband rose from the dead he would be believed? Good night, Doctor! I'm quite calm, you see, and you can safely go to bed.

DOCTOR. Good night then, Captain. I can't have any more to do with this case!

CAPTAIN. Are we enemies?

DOCTOR. Far from it! It's a pity though that we can't be friends! Good night! (*Goes.*)

CAPTAIN (*follows the DOCTOR to the door at the back, then goes to the door on the left and opens it slightly*). Come in, and we'll have a talk! I heard you out there listening!

### SCENE 5

(*LAURA comes in, embarrassed; the CAPTAIN sits down at his desk.*)

CAPTAIN. It's late, but we'd better have things out! Sit down! (*A pause.*) I've been to the post-office this evening to get my letters. They show that you've been keeping back my letters, both coming and going. The consequence is that the loss of time has practically ruined the results which I expected from my work.

LAURA. That was an act of kindness on my part: you were neglecting your military duties for that other work.

CAPTAIN. It can hardly have been an act of kindness;

## THE FATHER

you knew quite well that some day I should win greater fame from that than from my military duties; and fame, above all things, you hoped I should never win, since it would emphasize your own feeling of insignificance! In consequence of this I have intercepted letters addressed to you.

LAURA. What a noble act!

CAPTAIN. Ah, so you *can* take the higher view of me, as the saying is! – It appears from these letters that for some time past you've been setting all my old friends against me by lending your support to a rumour about my mental condition. Moreover, you have been successful in your efforts; for at the present moment there's not more than one person, from the Colonel to the kitchen-maid, who believes that I'm sane. Now the facts about my illness are these: my reason, as you know, is unaffected, so that I am fit to attend to my military duties as well as to my responsibilities as a father: my feelings are still more or less under my control, so long as my will-power remains practically undamaged: but you have so gnawed and gnawed at it that it will soon slip the cogs, and then – buzz goes all the clockwork! – I won't appeal to your feelings, for you have none; that is your strength! But I appeal to your interests.

LAURA. Please go on!

CAPTAIN. You have succeeded by your conduct in arousing my suspicions to such an extent that my reasoning powers will soon be clouded and my thoughts are beginning to go astray. This means the approach of that insanity which you have been waiting for, and which may come now at any moment. The question then arises for you: is it to your interest that I should be

## THE FATHER

well, or ill? Consider. If I go under I lose my work, and where will you be then? If I die you will get the benefit of my life-insurance. But if I take my own life, you get nothing. It is therefore to your interest that I should live out my life.

LAURA. Is this a trap?

CAPTAIN. Obviously! It's for you to avoid it, or put your head in!

LAURA. You talk about killing yourself. You'll never do that!

CAPTAIN. Are you sure? Do you think a man can live when he has nothing, and no one to live for?

LAURA. You surrender then?

CAPTAIN. No: I offer peace.

LAURA. The conditions?

CAPTAIN. That you allow me to keep my reason. Free me from my suspicions, and I give up the fight!

LAURA. What suspicions?

CAPTAIN. About Bertha's parentage.

LAURA. Are there any doubts about that?

CAPTAIN. Yes, with me there are: and you have awakened them!

LAURA. I?

CAPTAIN. Yes; you have dropped them like henbane in my ear, and circumstances have encouraged their growth. Free me from the uncertainty: tell me straight out, 'That is the truth,' and you are already forgiven.

LAURA. I can't well plead guilty to a sin of which I am innocent!

CAPTAIN. What does it matter when you have the certainty that I shall not divulge it? Do you think a man would go and blazon abroad his own shame?

## THE FATHER

LAURA. If I say it's not true, you won't be convinced; if I say it is, then you will! Do you want it to be true then?

CAPTAIN. Strangely enough, yes! I suppose because the former supposition can't be proved, while the other can!

LAURA. Have you any grounds for your suspicions?

CAPTAIN. Yes, and no!

LAURA. I believe you want to prove me guilty so that you can get rid of me and so obtain absolute control over the child. That sort of trap won't catch *me*!

CAPTAIN. Do you think I should care to look after another man's child if I were convinced of your guilt?

LAURA. No, I'm certain you wouldn't. That's why I'm sure you were lying just now when you said I was already forgiven!

CAPTAIN (*getting up*). Laura! Save me, and my reason! You don't seem to understand what I say. Unless the child is mine I have no control over her, and I wish for none. Isn't that the one thing you want? Isn't it? Perhaps there's something else you want – something more? Do you wish to have the sole power over the child and at the same time to have me to maintain you both?

LAURA. The power – yes! What has all this life-and-death struggle been for, except the power?

CAPTAIN. To me, who do not believe in a life to come, the child was my future life. She was my conception of immortality – perhaps the only one that has any counterpart in the realm of fact. Take that away, and you cut off my life!

LAURA. Why didn't we separate in time?



## THE FATHER

CAPTAIN. Because the child linked us together; but the link became a chain. And how did that happen? How? It's a thing I've never given a thought to; but now remembrance rises up, accusing, perhaps condemning. We had been married two years, and had no children – you know best why. I fell ill, and lay at death's door. In an interval of the fever I heard voices out in the drawing-room. It was you and the solicitor talking about the estate which at that time I still owned. He explained that you could inherit nothing, because we had no children, and he asked if you were expecting to become a mother. I didn't catch your reply. I recovered, and we had a child. Who is the father?

LAURA. You!

CAPTAIN. No, not I! There's a crime lying buried here that's beginning to stink! And what a hellish crime! You women took pity on the black slaves and set them free: but you have kept the white ones! I have worked and slaved for you, your child, your mother and your servants; I have sacrificed career and promotion; I have suffered torture, floggings, sleeplessness, anxiety on your behalf, till my hair has grown grey; and all this so that you might enjoy a life free from care, and when you grew old, enjoy it over again in your child. All this I have borne without a murmur, because I believed myself the father of that child. It's the lowest form of theft, the most brutal slavery! I have undergone seventeen years' penal servitude, and been innocent all the time! What can you give me in return for that?

LAURA. Now you are quite mad!

CAPTAIN (*sitting down*). So you hope! – Moreover, I have seen how you have worked in order to conceal

## THE FATHER

your crime. I have sympathized with you because I didn't understand your trouble; I have often lulled your evil conscience to rest, thinking that I was driving away some morbid thought; I have heard you cry out in your sleep and refused to listen. And now I remember the night before last — Bertha's birthday. It was between two and three in the morning, and I was sitting up, reading. You screamed out, as if some one were trying to strangle you, 'Don't come! Don't come.' I knocked on the wall — I didn't want to hear any more. I had had my suspicions for a long time, but dared not hear them confirmed. That is what I have suffered for you; what will you do for me?

LAURA. What can I do? I'll swear before God and all that I hold sacred that you are Bertha's father.

CAPTAIN. What good will that be, when you have already told me that a mother can and ought to commit any crime for the sake of her child? I implore you, in memory of the past, I implore you as a wounded man begs for the death-blow — tell me all! Don't you see that I'm as helpless as a child? Don't you hear how I'm complaining as to a mother? Won't you forget that I'm a man, a soldier who with a word can quell man and beast? I ask you only as a sick man asks for sympathy. I lay down the tokens of my power, and I pray for mercy on my life!

LAURA (*comes and puts her hand on his forehead*). What! You are crying, man!

CAPTAIN. Yes, I am crying, though I am a man. Hath not a man eyes? Hath not a man hands, limbs, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, warmed and cooled by the

## THE FATHER

same winter and summer as a woman is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? Why shouldn't a man complain, a soldier weep? Because it's unmanly! Why is it unmanly?

LAURA. Weep then, my child: then you will have your mother with you again! Do you remember that it was as your second mother I first came into your life? Your great strong body lacked nerves. You were too big a child, either come too early into the world, or perhaps not wanted at all.

CAPTAIN. Yes, it was something like that. My father and mother didn't *want* me, and thus I was born without a will. I thought therefore that I was completing myself when you and I became one, and that is why you got the upper hand; while I—I who gave the orders in barracks and before the troops, became in your presence the one to obey. So I grew by your side, looked up to you as to a more highly-gifted creature, and listened to you as if I were your foolish little boy.

LAURA. Yes, that's how it was then, and that is why I loved you as if you were my child. But whenever the nature of your feelings changed and you showed yourself as my lover, you must have seen how ashamed I was. Your embraces were a joy followed by prickings of conscience, as if my very blood felt shame. The mother became mistress! Ugh!

CAPTAIN. I saw, but I didn't understand. And when I thought I read in your eyes contempt for my unmanliness, I tried to win you as a woman, by being a man.

LAURA. Yes, but that is where the mistake lay. The

## THE FATHER

mother, you see, was your friend, but the woman was your enemy, and love between the sexes is strife. And don't imagine that I gave myself to you! I didn't give, I took – what I wanted. But you had one advantage, which I felt, and wished you to feel.

CAPTAIN. You always had the advantage. You could hypnotize me when I was wide awake, so that I neither saw nor heard, but merely obeyed: you could give me a raw potato and make me imagine it was a peach. You could make me admire your ideas as if they were flashes of genius: you could have led me into crime, yes, even into mean actions. For you lacked understanding, and not content to act as the executor of my plans, you acted on your own initiative. But when afterwards I woke up and reflected, and felt that my honour had been wounded, I wanted to wipe out the memory of it by some great deed – some exploit, some discovery – or an honourable death by my own hand. I wanted to fight for my country, but no opportunity came. It was then that I turned to science. And now, at the very moment when I should be stretching out my hand to gather the fruit – you chop off my arm! I am bereft of honour now, and can live no more: for without honour a man cannot live!

LAURA. But a woman?

CAPTAIN. Yes: for she has her children; and he has not. But we, like the rest of mankind, lived our lives, unconscious as children, filled with fancies, ideals and illusions; and then we awoke. Yes, but we woke with our feet on the pillow, and he who awakened us was himself a sleep-walker. When women grow old and cease to be women, they get beards on their chins. I

## ACT III

*The same setting as in the previous Acts, but another lamp.  
The papered door is barricaded with a chair.*

### SCENE I

(LAURA; the NURSE.)

LAURA. Did he give you the keys?

NURSE. Give me them? No, God help us, but I took them out of master's clothes Nöjd had out to brush.

LAURA. Is Nöjd on duty to-day then?

NURSE. Yes, it's Nöjd.

LAURA. Give me the keys.

NURSE. Well, now, but doesn't it seem just like stealing? Do you hear him walking about up there? Up and down, up and down!

LAURA. Is the door properly fastened?

NURSE. Oh yes, it's fastened safe enough.

LAURA (*opens the chiffonier and sits at the desk*). Control your feelings, Margret! We must all keep calm – that's our only chance of safety.

(*A knock is heard.*)

Who is it?

NURSE (*opens door to hall*). It's Nöjd.

LAURA. Ask him to come in.

(NÖJD *enters*.)

NÖJD. A message from the Colonel!

LAURA. Bring it here! (*Reads*.) Ah! – Nöjd, have you taken all the cartridges out of the guns and pouches?

## THE FATHER

NÖJD. Yes, Ma'am! Just as you said!

LAURA. Then wait outside while I answer the Colonel's note!

(NÖJD goes.)

(LAURA writes.)

NURSE. Listen, Ma'am! Whatever is he doing now up there?

LAURA. Do be quiet while I'm writing!

(*Sounds of sawing are heard.*)

NURSE (*half to herself*). Lord have mercy on us all! What will be the end of this!

LAURA. There! Give this to Nöjd. And remember my mother is to know nothing of all this. Do you hear?

(*The NURSE goes to door. LAURA opens drawers in the desk and takes out some papers.*)

## SCENE 2

(LAURA; the PASTOR takes a chair and sits beside LAURA at the desk.)

PASTOR. Good evening, sister! I've been out all day, as you know, and only this minute got home. Serious things have been happening here.

LAURA. Yes, brother! Such a night, such a day, never have I gone through before!

PASTOR. Well, anyhow, I see you're not hurt.

LAURA. No, thank God! But think what might have happened!

PASTOR. But tell me how it all began! I've heard so many different accounts.

## THE FATHER

LAURA. It began with those wild ideas of his about not being Bertha's father, and ended with his throwing the lighted lamp in my face.

PASTOR. But this is terrible! It must be downright insanity! And what's to be done now?

LAURA. We must try to stop any further outbreaks. The Doctor has sent to the hospital for a strait-waist-coat. Meanwhile I have sent a message to the Colonel, and am trying to get some idea as to our household affairs which he has managed so reprehensibly.

PASTOR. It's a sad story, but I've always expected something of the sort. Fire and water must end in explosion! What have you got in that drawer?

LAURA (*who has pulled out one of the desk-drawers*). So this is where he kept everything!

PASTOR (*looking through the drawer*). Good heavens! Here's your doll! And here's your christening-cap! And Bertha's rattle – and your letters – and the locket . . . (*Dries his eyes.*) After all, he must have loved you very dearly, Laura. I never kept that sort of thing myself!

LAURA. I believe he once loved me, but time – time changes so many things!

PASTOR. What's this huge paper? Receipt for a grave! – Well, better the grave than the asylum! – Tell me, Laura! Are you quite guiltless in this matter?

LAURA. I? Why should I be blamed because a man goes out of his mind?

PASTOR. Ah well! I won't say anything! After all, blood is thicker than water!

LAURA. May I ask what you mean by that?

PASTOR (*looking steadfastly at her*). Look here!

## THE FATHER

LAURA. What is it?

PASTOR. Look here! You can hardly deny that it would suit you admirably to be allowed to bring up your child yourself?

LAURA. I don't understand!

PASTOR. I do admire you, Laura!

LAURA. Do you? H'm!

PASTOR. To think that I should become guardian to that free-thinker! You know, I always looked on him as a weed in our meadow!

LAURA (*gives a short suppressed laugh: then becomes serious again at once*). And you dare say that to me, his wife?

PASTOR. You are strong, I see, Laura! Incredibly strong! Like a fox in a trap, you'd rather gnaw off your own leg than let yourself be caught! – Like a master-thief: no accomplice – not even your own conscience! – Look at yourself in the glass! You dare not!

LAURA. I never use a looking-glass!

PASTOR. No, you dare not! – Let me look at your hand! – Not one speck of blood to betray you: not a trace of the insidious poison! A little innocent murder that the law cannot reach: an unconscious crime! Unconscious? What a beautiful discovery! – Listen to him working up there! Take care! If that man gets loose, he'll saw you in pieces!

LAURA. You must have a bad conscience – talking away like that! – Accuse me – if you can!

PASTOR. I cannot!

LAURA. There you are! You cannot; therefore I am innocent! And now, you take care of your ward, and I'll look after mine! – Ah, here's the Doctor!



# THE FATHER

## SCENE 3

*(The Former; the DOCTOR.)*

LAURA (*getting up*). I'm glad to see you, Doctor! You at least will help me, won't you? Unfortunately there isn't much to be done. Do you hear how he's going on up there? Are you convinced now?

DOCTOR. I am convinced that an act of violence has been committed; but now the question arises, should that act of violence be regarded as an outbreak of passion, or of madness?

PASTOR. But setting aside the actual outbreak, you will admit that he suffered from fixed ideas?

DOCTOR. I believe your own ideas, Pastor, are still more fixed!

PASTOR. My firmly-rooted convictions on the highest matters . . .

DOCTOR. We'll put convictions aside! — Madam, it is for you to decide whether your husband is liable to imprisonment and a fine, or to detention in the asylum. What is your opinion of the Captain's behaviour?

LAURA. I can't answer that question now!

DOCTOR. Then you have no firmly-rooted conviction as to what will be to the best interests of the family? What do you say, Pastor?

PASTOR. Oh, well, there'll be scandal in either case . . . it isn't easy to say!

LAURA. But he may repeat his violence if he gets off with only a fine.

DOCTOR. And if he's sent to prison he'll soon be out again. For these reasons we consider it best for all

## THE FATHER

parties that he should forthwith be treated as insane. Where is the nurse?

LAURA. Why do you ask?

DOCTOR. I want her to put the strait-waistcoat on the patient, as soon as I have spoken to him and given the order! But not before! I have the — er — garment outside! (*Goes to the hall and comes back with a large parcel.*) Kindly ask the nurse to come in!

(*LAURA rings the bell.*)

PASTOR. Horrible! Horrible!

(*The NURSE comes in.*)

DOCTOR (*unpacks the waistcoat*). Now please pay attention! I want you to slip this waistcoat on the Captain from behind, as soon as I find it necessary, in order to prevent outbreaks of violence. It has, as you see, unusually long sleeves, so as to hamper his movements; and these are tied together behind his back. And here we have two straps, passing through buckles, which you afterwards make fast to the arm of the chair or sofa, whichever is most convenient. Will you do this?

NURSE. No, Doctor, that I can't do, I can't indeed!

LAURA. Why don't you do it yourself, Doctor?

DOCTOR. Because the patient distrusts me. You, Madam, are really the proper person to do it, but I fear he distrusts you too.

(*LAURA makes a grimace.*)

Perhaps you, Pastor . . .

PASTOR. I must ask to be excused!

# THE FATHER

## SCENE 4

*(The Former; NÖJD.)*

LAURA. Did you leave the note?

NÖJD. Yes, Ma'am!

DOCTOR. Oh, is that you, Nöjd? You know the state of things here; the Captain is out of his mind, and you must help us to look after him.

NÖJD. If there's anything I can do for the Captain, he knows I'll do it!

DOCTOR. We want you to put this waistcoat on him . . .

NURSE. No! He shan't touch him. Nöjd mustn't hurt him! Then I'll have to do it myself—so very, very gently! Still, Nöjd can wait outside and help me if I want it. . . . Yes, that's what he shall do.

*(Loud knocking on the papered door.)*

DOCTOR. There he is! Put the waistcoat under your shawl on the chair, and go out, all of you, while the Pastor and I receive him. That door won't hold many minutes. — Out, quick!

NURSE *(going out left)*. The Lord help us!

*(LAURA shuts the desk and then goes out left. NÖJD goes out at the back.)*

## SCENE 5

*(The papered door bursts open: the lock is broken and the chair is hurled along the floor. The CAPTAIN comes through with a pile of books under his arm. The DOCTOR and the PASTOR.)*

CAPTAIN *(puts the books on the table)*. Here's the whole thing, and in every single book! So I wasn't so mad

## THE FATHER

after all! Here we have in the *Odyssey*, Book I, line 215, page 6 in the Uppsala translation: Telemachus speaking to Athene: 'My mother indeed asserts that he' — meaning Odysseus — 'is my father. But I cannot be sure of that myself, since no man ever yet could tell his own origin.' And that is the suspicion which Telemachus has about Penelope, the most virtuous of women! Splendid, what! And here we have the prophet Ezekiel: 'The fool saith, Lo, here is my father: but who can tell whose loins have engendered him?' That's clear enough, surely. And what's this we have here? *History of Russian Literature*, by Merzlyakov. Alexander Pushkin, Russia's greatest poet, died after suffering great agony. His death was due, not so much to the bullet wound which he received in his breast in a duel, as to the rumours in circulation regarding his wife's infidelity. On his deathbed he swore that she was innocent. Ass! Ass! How could he swear to that? Notice, by the way, that I do read my books! — Hullo, Jonas! You here? And the Doctor of course! Did I ever tell you what I said to an English lady who was horrified at the Irishmen's habit of throwing lighted paraffin lamps in their wives' faces? — 'God, what women!' I said. 'Women?' she simpered! — 'Of course!' said I. 'When things come to such a pass that a man — a man who has loved and adored a woman — goes and takes a lighted lamp and throws it in her face — well, one can tell!'

PASTOR. What can one tell?

CAPTAIN. Nothing! One never knows anything, one only believes, eh, Jonas? One believes, and one is saved. Saved be damned! I know that a man can be lost by his belief. Yes, I know that!

## THE FATHER

DOCTOR. But Captain!

CAPTAIN. Silence! I don't want to speak to you. I don't want to hear you repeating all their chatter in there, like a telephone! In there! Yes, you know what I mean! – Now, Jonas! Do you believe that you are the father of your children? I remember you used to have a tutor at home – rather a comely fellow too. People used to talk about him.

PASTOR. Adolf! Take care what you say!

CAPTAIN. Feel under your wig, and see if you can't find two little bumps there. Heavens! Why, the man's as white as a sheet! Oh, yes, it's all talk of course; but, good Lord, how people do talk! Well, we're all a ridiculous set of rascals anyhow, we married men. Aren't we, Doctor? – And what about your own marriage bed? Didn't you have a certain lieutenant in your house, what? Just let me have a guess! His name was (*whispers in his ear*). Why, if he doesn't turn pale too! Cheer up, old fellow. *She's* dead and buried, and what's done can't be undone! I knew him once, by the way. He is now – look at me, Doctor! – no, look me straight in the eyes! – a major of Dragoons! By God! I really believe he's got horns too!

DOCTOR (*pained*). Captain, I must really ask you to change the subject!

CAPTAIN. You see! When I want to talk about horns he at once wants to change the subject!

PASTOR. You know, brother, you are not quite in your right senses.

CAPTAIN. Yes, I know that well enough. But if I had the handling of *your* decorated heads for a time, you'd soon find yourselves locked up too! I am mad, but how

## THE FATHER

did I become mad? That doesn't concern you, nor anybody else! Now would you like to change the subject? (*Takes the photograph-album from the table.*) Christ! my daughter! Mine! We can't be sure of that! Do you know what you have to do in order to make sure? First you marry, so as to be recognized in society. Then you separate immediately after, and become lover and mistress; and finally you adopt the children. Then you can at least be sure they are your own adopted children! Isn't that so? — But how does all that help me now? What *can* help me now, when you have robbed me of my hope of immortality? What use is my science and philosophy when I have nothing left to live for? What can I do with my life when I have no honour left? I grafted my right arm, half my brains, and half my backbone on another stem, thinking that they would grow together and unite in a single, more perfect tree; and then somebody comes with a knife and hacks them off below the grafting-place, and now I am only half a tree! But the other half goes on growing, with my arm and half my brains, while I dwindle away and die; for it was the best part of myself that I gave. And now let me die! Do what you will with me! I am no more!

(*The DOCTOR and the PASTOR whisper together. They go out left into the other room. Immediately afterwards BERTHA comes in.*)

### SCENE 6

(*The CAPTAIN; BERTHA. The CAPTAIN is sitting at the table huddled up.*)

BERTHA (*going up to him*). Daddy! Are you ill?

CAPTAIN (*looks up wearily*). Do you mean me?

## THE FATHER

BERTHA. Do you know what you have done? Do you know that you threw the lamp at Mummy?

CAPTAIN. Did I?

BERTHA. Yes, you did. Suppose she had been hurt!

CAPTAIN. What would that have mattered?

BERTHA. You are not my father if you speak like that!

CAPTAIN. What's that you say? I am not your father? How d'you know that? Who told you? And pray, who is your father? Who?

BERTHA. Well, not you anyhow!

CAPTAIN. Always the same – not me! Who is then? Who? You seem to have been well informed! Who told you? To think that I should live to hear my own child tell me to my face that I'm not her father! Don't you know that you are insulting your mother when you say such things? Don't you understand that if it is so, it is a stain on her?

BERTHA. Now don't you go saying anything unkind about Mummy!

CAPTAIN. Ah, I see you all hold together – every one of you against me! Yes! That's what you've been all the time!

BERTHA. Daddy!

CAPTAIN. Don't use that word any more!

BERTHA. Daddy! Daddy!

CAPTAIN (*drawing her towards him*). Bertha, dear, darling child! You *are* my child! Yes, yes, it must be so – it is so! That other idea was merely a sick man's fancy, which came with the wind, like pestilence and fever. Look at me, so that I may see my soul in your eyes! – But I see *her* soul too! You have two souls, and

## THE FATHER

you love me with one, and hate me with the other. But you must love only me! You must have only one soul – otherwise you will never have peace; nor I either! You must have only one thought, the child of *my* thought, and only one will – mine!

BERTHA. I don't want that! I want to be myself!

CAPTAIN. That you shall never be! You see I'm a cannibal, and I want to eat you. Your mother wanted to eat me, but she could not: I am Saturn, who devoured his own children, because it was foretold that if he didn't, they would devour *him*. Devour – or be devoured – that is the question! If I don't eat you, you will eat me: you have already shown me your teeth! But don't be afraid, darling: I shan't do you any harm! (*Goes to the arm-rack and takes down a revolver.*)

BERTHA (*trying to escape*). Help, Mummy, help! He's trying to murder me!

NURSE (*coming in*). Master Adolf, what is the matter?

CAPTAIN (*examining the revolver*). Did you take out the cartridges?

NURSE. Yes, I did tidy them away; but just sit down here quietly and I'll soon fetch them back. (*Takes the CAPTAIN by the arm and seats him on a chair, where he remains sitting listlessly. Then she produces the strait-waist-coat, and takes up her position behind the chair.*)

(BERTHA creeps out to the left.)

Now I wonder if Master Adolf remembers when he was my darling little boy, and I used to tuck him up at night and read 'God who lovest' to him! And does he remember how I used to get up in the night to give him something to drink: and how I lighted the candle and



## THE FATHER

told him pretty stories when he had nasty dreams and couldn't get to sleep? Does he remember that?

CAPTAIN. Go on talking, Margret. It does my head good. Go on talking!

NURSE. Very well, but Master Adolf must attend then! Does he remember that time when he got hold of a great big kitchen knife, and wanted to carve boats, and how I came in and had to get the knife away by a trick? He was rather a silly little boy, so one had to play tricks on him! He would never believe that what one did was for his own good. – 'Quick! give me that snake,' I cried, 'or it'll bite you!' And he lets go of the knife that second! (*Takes the revolver out of the CAPTAIN's hand.*) And then when it was time for him to dress and he didn't want to! Then I had to coax him and tell him he should have a coat of gold and be dressed like a prince. And then I took his little jacket – just made of common green wool – and I held it up in front of him and said, 'In with the arms now! *Both* together!' And then I said, 'Now sit nice and quiet while I button up the back!' (*She has got the waistcoat on him.*) And then I said, 'Now get up and walk nicely along the floor, so Nurse can see how it fits!' (*Leads him to the sofa.*) And then I said, 'And now he must go off to bed!'

CAPTAIN. What do you say? Go to bed when he was just dressed? – Damnation! What have you been doing to me? (*Tries to get free.*) Oh, you hellishly cunning woman! Who would have thought you had the brains for it! (*Lies down on the sofa.*) Caught, shorn, tricked! And I can't even die!

NURSE. Forgive me, Master Adolf, forgive me! I had to stop you killing your child!

## THE FATHER

CAPTAIN. Why didn't you let me kill the child? Isn't life a hell, and death a heaven? Children belong to heaven!

NURSE. What can you know about what comes after death?

CAPTAIN. That's the only thing one does know. Of life one knows nothing! Oh, if only one had known from the beginning!

NURSE. Master Adolf! Bend your stubborn heart and call on your God for mercy! It's still not too late. It wasn't too late for the thief on the cross when our Saviour said, 'To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.'

CAPTAIN. Croaking for corpses already, old crow?

*(NURSE takes a hymn-book out of her pocket.)*

*(Calls out)* Nöjd! Is Nöjd there?

*(NÖJD comes in.)*

Throw that woman out of the house! She wants to choke me to death with her hymn-book. Throw her out of the window, or up the chimney, or any way you like!

NÖJD *(looking at NURSE)*. God save you, Captain, from the bottom of my heart! But I can't do it. I simply can't! If only it were six men now; but a woman! No!

CAPTAIN. D'you mean to say you can't manage a woman?

NÖJD. Oh, I can manage 'em all right; but you see there's something peculiar stops a man wanting to lay hands on a woman.

CAPTAIN. Peculiar? What do you mean? Haven't they been laying hands on *me*?

## THE FATHER

NÖJD. Yes, but I can't do it, Captain! It's downright as if you told me to strike the Pastor. It's a sort of religion, like: it's in our bones. I can't do it!

### SCENE 7

(*The Former; LAURA. She gives a sign to NÖJD to go.*)

CAPTAIN. Omphale! Omphale! Playing with the club while Hercules spins the wool for you!

LAURA (*going to the sofa*). Adolf! look at me! Do you believe that I'm your enemy?

CAPTAIN. Yes, that's what I do believe. I believe you are all my enemies! My mother, who didn't want me to come into the world because I had to be born with pain, was my enemy. She robbed my life's young seed of its nourishment, and made me half a cripple! My sister was my enemy, since she taught me to be in subjection to her. The first woman I ever clasped in my arms was my enemy: she gave me ten years' illness in return for the love I gave her. My daughter became my enemy when she had to choose between you and me! And you, my wife, — you have been my mortal enemy, for you never left me till I lay lifeless!

LAURA. I don't know that I ever thought of or intended what you think. It may be that some dim desire to get rid of you, as something that stood in my way, may have held sway within me; but if you see any fixed plan in my conduct, then possibly I had one, though I myself did not see it. I have never given much thought to my actions; they have glided along the rails that you yourself laid down, and before God and my conscience I feel that I am innocent, even if

## THE FATHER

I am not. Your existence has been for me like a stone on my heart, pressing and pressing on it till the heart tried to shake off its obstructive burden. That, I think, is what it was; and if I have hurt you unwittingly I ask you to forgive me.

CAPTAIN. It all sounds plausible. But how does it help me? And whose fault is it? The fault perhaps of the spiritual marriage? In the old days one married a wife: nowadays one enters into partnership with a business woman, or sets up house with a friend! – And then one cohabits with one's partner and violates one's friend! What becomes of love – the healthy love of the senses? It dies on the spot. And what is the offspring of this love in shares payable to bearer, without any joint responsibility? Who is the bearer when the crash comes? Who is the bodily father of the spiritual child?

LAURA. And as to your suspicions about the child, they are quite groundless.

CAPTAIN. That's just the terrible part of it! If there *had* been any foundation for them, at least one would have had something to catch hold of, to cling on to. As it is, there are only shadows, that hide in the bushes and thrust out their heads to laugh. It's like fighting with air, or a sham fight with blank cartridges. The deadly reality would have called forth resistance, nerved body and soul to action. But, as it is . . . my thoughts dissolve into vapours, and my brain grinds a void till it takes fire! Give me a pillow under my head! And put something over me: I am cold – so terribly cold!

(LAURA takes her shawl and spreads it over him. The NURSE goes to fetch a pillow.)

## THE FATHER

LAURA. Give me your hand, dear!

CAPTAIN. My hand? That you have tied behind my back! . . . Omphale! Omphale! But I feel your soft shawl against my mouth – warm and soft as your arm; it has a scent of vanilla, like your hair when you were young! When you were young, Laura, and we used to walk in the birch-woods, among the oxlips and the thrushes – glorious, glorious! Think how fair life has been, and what it is now! You didn't want it to become what it is, nor I either! And yet it has become so. Who then rules over life!

LAURA. God alone rules . . .

CAPTAIN. The God of strife then! Or Goddess, in these days! Take away that cat that's lying on me!

*(The NURSE comes in with the pillow and removes the shawl.)*

Give me my tunic! Throw that over me!

*(The NURSE takes his tunic from the peg and lays it over him.)*

Ah, my tough lion-skin that you would take away from me! Omphale! Omphale! You cunning woman! Lover of peace and contriver of disarmament! Arouse thee, Hercules, ere they take thy club from thee! You would trick us out of our armour too, pretending to believe it was tinsel. Nay, but it was iron, I tell you, before it became tinsel. In olden days it was the smith who forged the coat of mail: now it is the sempstress! Omphale! Omphale! Rude strength has fallen before treacherous weakness. Out on thee, thou devilish woman! And a curse on all thy sex! *(Raises himself on the sofa to spit, but sinks back again.)* What sort of pillow is this that you've given me, Margret? It's so hard

## THE FATHER

and so cold – so cold! Come and sit here beside me on the chair. Yes, like that! Let me put my head on your knees! Ah, that feels warm! Lean over me so that I can feel your breast! – Oh, it is sweet to fall asleep on a woman's breast, be it a mother's or a lover's. But sweetest of all – a mother's!

LAURA. Would you like to see your child, Adolf? Tell me!

CAPTAIN. My child? A man has no children: it's only women who get children, and that's why the future is theirs, while we die childless! – O God, who lovest children dear!

NURSE. Hark! He is praying to God!

CAPTAIN. No, to you! To put me to sleep! I'm tired, so tired! Good night, Margret! And blessed be thou among women! (*He raises himself, but falls back with a cry on the NURSE's knees.*)

### SCENE 8

(LAURA goes to the left and summons the DOCTOR, who enters with the PASTOR.)

LAURA. Help us, Doctor, if it's not too late! Look! He's stopped breathing!

DOCTOR (*feeling the sick man's pulse*). It's a stroke!

PASTOR. Is he dead?

DOCTOR. No, he may still come back to life: but to what an awakening we cannot tell.

PASTOR. First death, and after that the Judgment . . .

DOCTOR. No judgment! No indictment even! You, who believe that a God rules over human destinies, must speak with Him concerning this matter.

## THE FATHER

NURSE. Oh, Pastor, he prayed to God in his last hour!

PASTOR (*to LAURA*). Is that true?

LAURA. It is true!

DOCTOR. If that be so – and I can no more judge of that than I can of the cause of the illness – my skill has done all it can. It is for you to try yours now, Pastor.

LAURA. Is that all you have to say at this death-bed, Doctor?

DOCTOR. It is all: it's all I know. He that knows more – let him speak!

BERTHA (*comes in from the left and runs to her mother*). Mummy! Mummy!

LAURA. My child! My own child!

PASTOR. Amen!

CURTAIN

LADY JULIE  
A NATURALISTIC TRAGEDY

★

With a Preface by  
THE AUTHOR

★

Written 1888  
Translated by  
C. D. LOCOCK



## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

LADY JULIE, aged 25.

JEAN, a Valet, aged 30.

KRISTIN, a Cook, aged 35.

The Action takes place in the count's kitchen, on  
Midsummer Eve.

## PREFACE

DRAMATIC art, like other art in general, has long seemed to me a kind of *Biblia Pauperum* – a Bible in pictures for those who cannot read the written or printed word; and the dramatic author a lay preacher, who hawks about the ideas of his time in popular form – popular enough for the middle classes, who form the bulk of theatrical audiences, to grasp the nature of the subject without troubling their brains too much. The theatre, accordingly, has always been a board-school for the young, for the half-educated, and for women, who still retain the inferior faculty of deceiving themselves and allowing themselves to be deceived: that is to say, of being susceptible to illusion and to the suggestions of the author. Consequently, in these days, when the rudimentary and incompletely developed thought-process which operates through the imagination appears to be developing into reflection, investigation and examination, it has seemed to me that the theatre, like religion, may be on the verge of being abandoned as a form which is dying out, and for the enjoyment of which we lack the necessary conditions. This supposition is confirmed by the extensive theatrical crisis which now prevails throughout the whole of Europe, and especially by the fact that in those civilized countries which have produced the greatest thinkers of the age – that is to say, England and Germany – the dramatic art, like most other fine arts, is dead.

In other countries, however, it has been thought possible to create a new drama by filling the old forms with the contents of the newer age; but, for one thing,

## P R E F A C E

the new thoughts have not yet had time to become sufficiently popular for the public to gain the intelligence necessary for grasping the subject; moreover, party strife has so inflamed people's minds that pure, disinterested enjoyment is out of the question. One experiences a deep sense of contradiction when an applauding or hissing majority exercises its tyranny so openly as it can in the theatre. Lastly, we have not got the new form for the new contents, and the new wine has burst the old bottles.

In the present drama I have not tried to do anything new – for that is impossible – but merely to modernize the form in accordance with what I imagined would be required from this art by the younger generation. To that end I have selected, or allowed myself to be gripped by a motive which may be said to lie outside the party strife of the day, since the question of social climbing or falling, of the higher or the lower, of better or worse, of man or woman, is, has been and will continue to be of lasting interest. When I selected this motive from life, as it was related to me several years ago, when the incident made a deep impression on me, I found it suitable for a tragedy; for we still get a tragic impression at the sight of a fortunately situated individual going under, still more at the sight of a whole family dying out. But perhaps there will come a time when we have become so developed, so enlightened, that we shall view with indifference the spectacle presented by life, which now seems cruel, cynical and heartless; when we shall have closed down those inferior, unreliable thought-machines which are called feelings, and which become superfluous and harmful when our organs of

## PREFACE

discrimination are fully developed. The fact that the heroine arouses sympathy depends solely on our weakness in not being able to resist the feeling of fear that a similar fate may overtake us too. Nevertheless the extremely sensitive spectator will perhaps not be content with this sympathy, and the man of the future, possessed of faith, will perhaps demand some positive suggestions for remedying evil - in other words, some kind of programme. But in the first place there is no such thing as absolute evil; the ruin of one family means the good fortune of another, which is thereby enabled to rise; while the alternation of climbing and falling constitutes one of life's principal charms, since good fortune is merely comparative. Moreover, I should like to ask the man with the programme who wants to remedy the painful fact that the bird of prey devours the dove, and lice the bird of prey: why should it be remedied? Life is not so mathematically idiotic as to allow only the big to eat the small; it is just as common for the bee to kill the lion, or at any rate to drive him mad.

If my tragedy creates a sad impression on many people, that is their own fault. When we have become as strong as the pioneers of the French Revolution we shall receive an unquestionably pleasant and happy impression from viewing in the public parks the thinning out of rotten and superannuated trees, which have stood too long in the way of others equally entitled to live their day - an impression as happy as the sight of the death of an incurably sick man!

A short time ago my tragedy, *The Father*, was criticized for its sadness - as if one wanted cheerful tragedies. There is a clamorous insistence on the joy of

## P R E F A C E

life, and managers are sending out requests for farces, as if the joy of life consisted in being idiotic and in portraying all men as sufferers from St. Vitus' dance or congenital idiocy. Personally, I find the joy of life in its tense and cruel struggles, and my enjoyment lies in getting to know something, in getting to learn something. I have chosen for that reason an unusual case, but a very instructive one; an exception in fact, but a great exception, of the kind which confirms the rule; one which I suppose will give pain to those who love the commonplace. The simple brain will also be offended by the fact that the motives which I offer for the incident are not simple, and that the point of view is not invariably one and the same. An incident in life – and this is a fairly new discovery! – is usually caused by a whole series of more or less deeply underlying motives; but the spectator commonly selects the one which his own intellect finds the easiest to grasp, or the one which brings most credit to his powers of discernment. A suicide is committed. Business troubles! says the ordinary citizen. – Unrequited love! say the women. – Ill-health! the invalid. – Shattered hopes! the unfortunate. But it is quite possible that the motive lay in all or in none of these directions, and that the dead man concealed the main motive by putting forward a quite different one which would reflect greater lustre on his memory!

Lady Julie's tragic fate has been ascribed by me to a whole multitude of circumstances: the instincts derived from her mother; the father's faulty upbringing of the girl; her own character and the influence of her betrothed on a weak degenerate brain; further, and

## PREFACE

more directly: the festive mood of Midsummer Eve; her father's absence; her own physical condition; her interest in animals; the exciting influences of the dance; the dusk of night; the strongly aphrodisiac influence of the flowers; and finally, chance, which brings the pair together in a lonely room, *plus* the presumption of the excited man. Thus I have not treated the matter exclusively from a physiological, nor exclusively from a psychological point of view. I have not put the blame solely on the instincts inherited from her mother, nor solely on her physical condition, nor exclusively on 'immorality.' Nor have I merely preached a moral sermon! In the absence of a priest I have left this to the cook.

I must congratulate myself on this multiplicity of motives, as being in accordance with modern views! And if others have done the same thing before me, then I congratulate myself on not being alone in my paradoxes – as all discoveries are called.

In regard to the character-drawing, I have made my figures rather 'characterless,' for the following reasons:

The word 'character' has, in the course of the ages, assumed various meanings. Originally, I suppose, it signified the dominant characteristic of the soul-complex, and was confused with 'temperament.' Afterwards it became the middle-class expression for the automaton. An individual who had once for all become fixed in his natural disposition, or had adapted himself to some definite rôle in life – who, in fact, had ceased to grow – was called a 'character'; while the man who continued his development, the skilful navigator of life's river who does not sail with sheets set fast, but veers

## P R E F A C E

before the wind to luff again, was called 'characterless.' In a derogatory sense, of course, since he was so difficult to catch, to classify and to keep guard over. This middle-class conception of the immobility of the soul was transferred to the stage, where the middle-class has always ruled. A 'character' on the stage came to signify a gentleman who was fixed and finished: one who invariably came on the stage drunk, jesting or mournful. For characterization nothing was required but some bodily defect – a club-foot, a wooden leg, a red nose; or the character in question was made to repeat some such phrase as 'That's capital,' 'Barkis is willin',' or the like. This simple method of regarding human beings still survives in the great Molière. Harpagon is a miser pure and simple, though Harpagon might have been not only a miser but a first-rate financier, an excellent father, and a good citizen. Worse still, his 'defect' is a distinct advantage to his son-in-law and his daughter, who are his heirs, and who should not therefore blame him, even if they do have to wait a little for their wedding night. I do not believe, therefore, in simple characters on the stage. And the summary judgments on men given by authors: this man is stupid, this one brutal, this one jealous, this one stingy, etc., should be challenged by naturalists, who know the richness of the soul-complex, and recognize that 'vice' has a reverse side very much like virtue.

Since they are modern characters, living in a transitional age more feverishly hysterical than at least its predecessor, I have pictured my figures as more vacillating, as riven asunder, a blend of the old and the new; moreover, it does not seem to me improbable

## P R E F A C E

that modern ideas, conveyed through newspapers and conversations, might even have soaked down to the levels where a domestic servant may live.

My souls (characters) are conglomerations from past and present stages of civilization; they are excerpts from books and newspapers, scraps of humanity, pieces torn from festive garments which have become rags – just as the soul itself is a piece of patchwork. Besides this, I have provided a little evolutionary history in making the weaker repeat phrases stolen from the stronger, and in making my souls borrow ‘ideas’ – suggestions, as they are called – from one another.

Lady Julie is a modern character; not that the half-woman, the man-hater, has not existed in all ages, but because she has now been discovered, has stepped to the front and made herself heard. The half-woman is a type that is thrusting itself forward, that sells itself nowadays for power, for titles, for distinctions, for diplomas, as it used to sell itself for money. And it points to degeneration. It is not a good type – for it does not last – but unfortunately it transmits its own misery to another generation; moreover, degenerate men seem unconsciously to make their choice from among them, so that they multiply and produce offspring of indeterminate sex, to whom life is a torture. Fortunately, these women perish, either through lack of harmony with reality, or through the uncontrolled mutiny of the suppressed instinct, or through the shattering of their hopes of catching up with the men. The type is tragic, offering, as it does, the spectacle of a desperate fight with nature; tragic, too, as a romantic inheritance now being dispersed by naturalism, whose sole desire is



## PREFACE

happiness; and for happiness strong and good types are required.

But Lady Julie is also a relic of that old warrior aristocracy which is now giving place to the new aristocracy of nerve and brain. She is a victim of the discord which a mother's 'crime' has produced in a family; a victim, too, of the delusions of the day, of circumstances, of her own defective constitution – all of which together are the equivalents of the old-fashioned Fate or Universal Law. The naturalist has abolished guilt by abolishing God; but the consequences of an action – punishment, imprisonment or the fear of it – these he cannot abolish, for the simple reason that they remain, whether his verdict be acquittal or not; for an injured fellow-creature is not so complaisant as an outsider, who has not been injured, can well afford to be. Even if the father, for some urgent reason, had forgone his revenge, the daughter would have to take vengeance on herself, as she does in my play, as the result of that inborn or acquired sense of honour which the upper classes inherit – from what? From barbarism, from their primitive Aryan home, from the chivalry of the Middle Ages: all very beautiful, but a disadvantage nowadays to the continuation of the type. It is the aristocrat's *harakiri*, the inner law of conscience of the Japanese, which bids him cut open his own stomach at the insult of another, and which survives in a modified form in the duel, the privilege of the aristocracy. So the valet, Jean, continues to live, while Lady Julie cannot live without honour. That is where the thrall has an advantage over the earl: he is free from this fatal prejudice about honour. Moreover, in all of us Aryans

## P R E F A C E

there is a trace of the nobleman, or the Don Quixote, which makes us sympathize with the suicide who has committed a dishonourable action and so lost his honour; and we are aristocrats enough to be pained at the sight of fallen greatness encumbering the ground like a dead body, yes, even though the fallen rise again and make restitution by honourable deeds. The valet, Jean, is a type-builder, one in whom the distinctive character is strongly marked. He was a labourer's child who, through self-education, is now on his way to becoming a gentleman. With his finely-developed senses (smell, taste, sight) and his sense of beauty, he has found it easy to learn. He has already risen, and is strong enough to have no scruples about making use of the services of others. He is already foreign to his surroundings, which he despises as stages in a journey already passed; yet he fears them and shuns them because they know his secrets, pry into his plans, watch his rise with jealousy, and look forward with pleasure to his downfall. Hence arises his dual, indefinite character, vacillating between sympathy with high rank and hatred of those who now possess it. He is an aristocrat – he tells us so himself – has learnt the secrets of good society, is polished, though vulgar at heart, and already wears his frock-coat with taste, though we have no guarantee for his personal cleanliness.

He feels respect for the young lady, but is afraid of Kristin, since she is in possession of his dangerous secrets; he is sufficiently callous not to allow the events of the night to have any disturbing effect on his plans for the future. Uniting the cruelty of the slave with the tyrant's lack of squeamishness, he can see blood without

## PREFACE

fainting; he can take misfortune by the neck and hurl it to the ground. For this reason he will come out of the fight unwounded and probably end his days as a hotel-keeper. And if he himself does not become a Roumanian count, I expect his son will matriculate and perhaps become a district attorney.

In other respects the light which he throws on the lower-class conception of life, as seen from beneath, is very significant – that is, when he speaks the truth – which is not very often, since he prefers to say what is to his own advantage rather than what is true. When Lady Julie puts forward the suggestion that the lower classes must feel the pressure from above so heavily, Jean, of course, agrees, since his object is to win her sympathy; but he corrects his statement the moment he perceives the advantage of separating himself from the common herd.

Apart from the fact that Jean is now on the up-grade, he stands above Lady Julie in virtue of his manhood. Sexually he is the aristocrat by reason of his manly strength, his more finely developed senses, and his power of initiative. His inferiority is due mainly to the accidental social *milieu* in which he lives, and which he can probably lay aside with his livery.

The slavish disposition expresses itself in his reverence for the Count (the boots) and in his religious superstition; but his reverence for the Count is more for the occupant of the higher place that he himself is aiming at; and this reverence remains even when he has won the daughter of the house and discovered how empty was the beautiful shell.

Between souls of such different quality I do not

## P R E F A C E

think that any love-relationship, in the 'higher' sense, can arise. Accordingly I make Lady Julie imagine her love to be protective or exculpatory, while I make Jean suppose that love on his part might arise if his social position were altered. Love, I think, is like the hyacinth, which must strike root in the dark *before* it can produce a vigorous flower. In my play it shoots up, blossoms and runs to seed, all at the same time, and that is why the plant dies so quickly.

Lastly, Kristin is a feminine slave, with the dependent nature and slothfulness which she has acquired in front of the kitchen fire; stuffed full of morality and religion, which she makes her cloaks and scapegoats. She goes to church as a simple and easy way of unloading on Jesus her household thefts, and of taking in a fresh cargo of guiltlessness. For the rest, she is a minor character – intentionally, therefore, sketched in the same manner as the Pastor and the Doctor in *The Father*, where I wanted just everyday human beings, such as country pastors and provincial doctors usually are. And if some people think that these minor characters of mine are mere abstractions, this is due to the fact that everyday human beings *are* to a certain extent abstract in the pursuit of their calling; that is to say, they are dependent, showing only one side while they are at work. And so long as the spectator does not feel the need of seeing them from other sides, my abstract delineation of them is fairly correct.

Finally, as to the dialogue: I have rather broken with tradition in not making my characters catechists who sit asking foolish questions in order to elicit a smart reply. I have avoided the mathematically symmetrical

## PREFACE

construction of French dialogue and let people's brains work irregularly, as they do in actual life, where no topic of conversation is drained to the dregs, but one brain receives haphazard from the other a cog to engage with. Consequently, my dialogue too wanders about, providing itself in the earlier scenes with material which is afterwards worked up, admitted, repeated, developed and built up, like the theme in a musical composition.

The plot is full of possibilities, and since it really concerns only two characters I have confined myself to these, merely introducing one minor character, the cook, and allowing the father's unfortunate spirit to hover over and behind the whole. This is because I thought I had noticed that the psychological process is what chiefly interests the newer generation; our inquisitive souls are not content with seeing a thing happen; they must also know how it happens! What we want to see is the wires, the machinery; we want to examine the box with the false bottom, to handle the magic ring and find the joint, to have a look at the cards and see how they are marked.

In this connection I have kept in view the monographic novels of the brothers de Goncourt, to my mind the most attractive of all modern literature.

Coming now to the technical side of the composition, I have made the experiment of abolishing the division into acts. The experiment is due to my belief that our decreasing capacity for illusion was possibly weakened by intervals in which the spectator has time to reflect and thereby escape from the suggestive influence of the author-mesmerist. My play will probably last an hour and a half; and since one can listen to a lecture,

## P R E F A C E

a sermon or a parliamentary debate for as long as that, or longer, I imagine that a theatrical piece should not become fatiguing in the course of that time. As early as 1872, in one of my first dramatic attempts, *The Outlaw*, I tried this concentrated form, though with very little success. The piece was written in five acts and was finished when I first became aware of the restless, disjointed effect which it produced. I burnt it, and out of the ashes rose a single, highly elaborated act, fifty pages of type, and playable in one hour. The form of my play is thus by no means new, but it seems to be my own, and under the changed conditions of taste it may have some chance of suiting the times. My ambition would be to get a public so educated as to be capable of sitting through a one-act play lasting an entire evening. But this is a matter for investigation. However, in order to provide resting-points for the public and the performers without allowing the public to escape from the illusion, I have introduced three art-forms, all of which come under the heading of dramatic art, namely, the monologue, the pantomime and the ballet: all of which, too, in their original forms, belonged to ancient tragedy, the monody now becoming the monologue, and the chorus the ballet.

Our modern realists have condemned the monologue as unnatural; but if I provide a motive for it, I make it natural, and so can use it with advantage. It is natural, I suppose, for a public speaker to walk up and down the room rehearsing his speech by himself; it is natural for an actor to read through his part aloud, for the servant-girl to talk to her cat, for a mother to talk baby-talk to her child, for an old maid to chatter to her parrot, for a

## P R E F A C E

sleeper to talk in his sleep. Further, in order to give the actor for once a chance of working independently – a moment's rest from the author's pointer – it is better that the monologue be not written in full but merely indicated. For since it does not much matter what one says in one's sleep, or to the parrot or the cat – since it cannot influence the action – it is quite possible that a talented actor, who will necessarily be in touch with the spirit of the play and its situations, may improvise this better than the author, since the latter cannot calculate in advance how much can be spoken, and for how long, before the public awakens from its illusion.

It is well-known that the Italian theatre on some of its stages has gone back to improvisation, and thus produced creative actors – always, however, in accordance with the author's plans. This may be a step forward, or even some newly germinating form of art, which we may perhaps call *creative art*.

In cases, again, where monologue would be unnatural I have had recourse to pantomime, and in this I leave still greater scope for the actor's imagination – and for his desire to win independent honour! But to avoid trying the public beyond their powers of endurance I have allowed the music – for which here the midsummer dancing provides an excellent motive – to exercise its illusive sway during the dumb show; and I ask the musical director to give special attention to his choice of the pieces performed, so that no conflicting mood may be aroused by reminiscence from current operettas or dance repertoires, or from folk-songs of too local a character.

My ballet could not well have been replaced by a

## P R E F A C E

so-called 'folk-scene,' for folk-scenes are badly acted when a crowd of grinning apes try to seize the opportunity for showing off, thereby destroying the illusion. Since the 'people' do not improvise their ill-natured comments, but make use of material already to hand in which some double meaning may be found, I have not composed the lampoon, but have taken a little known dance-song which I jotted down for myself in the Stockholm district. The words are not quite to the point: they miss the bull's-eye, but that was really my intention, since the element of cunning (i.e. weakness) in the slave prevents him from delivering a direct attack. So we must have no 'funny men' in a serious play, no coarse grinning over a situation which nails the lid on the coffin of a family.

As regards the scenery, I have borrowed from impressionist painting its asymmetry and its abruptness, and I think that I have thus succeeded in creating illusion; for the fact that one does not see the whole room and the whole of the furniture leaves scope for conjecture – in other words, the imagination is set in motion and supplements the senses. I have succeeded, too, in getting rid of those tiresome exits through doors – all the more tiresome because doors on the stage are made of canvas and swing at the lightest touch; most assuredly they cannot express the wrath of an irate father of a family when, after a bad dinner, he goes out and slams the door 'so that the whole house shakes.' (In the theatre it rocks.) I have also confined myself to a single setting, with the idea not only of letting the characters grow into their *milieu*, but of breaking away from decorative luxury. But when there is one setting only, it may be



## PREFACE

demanded that it should be natural. Nothing is harder than to get a room which looks something like a room, however easy it may be for the painter to produce flaming volcanoes and waterfalls. No doubt the walls must be of canvas, but it really seems time to draw the line at painting shelves and kitchen utensils on the canvas. There is so much else on the stage that is conventional, and which we are asked to accept, that we might be spared the strain involved in believing in painted saucepans.

I have placed the backcloth and the table diagonally, so that the actors may be seen full-face and in half-profile when they are sitting opposite each other at the table. In the opera *Aida* I have seen a diagonally arranged background which led the eye away into unseen perspectives, and it did not seem to be due to any reaction against the wearisome straight line.

Another perhaps not unnecessary novelty would be the abolition of footlights. The object of this illumination from below is said to be to make the actors' faces look fatter. But I ask, why should all actors have fat faces? Does not this lighting from below smooth away the delicate lines in the lower part of the face, especially the jaws? Does it not falsify the shape of the nose and cast shadows over the eyes? Even if this is not so, one thing is certain: the light hurts the actors' eyes so that the effective play of their glances is lost; for the glare of the footlights strikes parts of the retina which are usually protected (except in the case of sailors, who are used to seeing the sunlight on the water); and that is the reason why one seldom sees any play of the eyes, other than showing the whites in a crude rolling sideways, or up

## P R E F A C E

towards the gallery. Perhaps we may trace to the same source that tiresome blinking of the eyelids which we see especially in the case of actresses. Moreover, when anybody on the stage wishes to speak with his eyes, he has nothing but the unsatisfactory resource of looking straight at the audience, with whom he or she thus gets into direct communication *outside* the frame of the picture – a vice which, rightly or wrongly, goes by the name of ‘greeting one’s friends’!

Would not the use of sufficiently powerful sidelights (aided by reflectors or the like) afford the actor this new resource – the strengthening of his powers of mimicry by means of the face’s chief asset – the play of the eyes?

I can hardly have any illusions as to the possibility of getting the actor to play *to* the audience, instead of *with* it, however desirable that might be. I do not dream of ever seeing the actor turn his back completely throughout the whole of an important scene; but I do earnestly wish that crucial scenes should not be played in the vicinity of the prompter’s box, as though they were duets intended to be applauded. I should like them to be given in the place indicated by the situation. No revolutions, then, but just a few small modifications; for to turn the stage into a room with the fourth wall missing, and consequently with some of the furniture placed with its back to the audience, would probably, at present, have a disturbing effect.

In speaking of making-up I hardly dare hope to be listened to by the ladies, who would rather look beautiful than natural. But the male actor might perhaps consider whether it really is an advantage for him to make up his face into some abstract character, fixed on

## PREFACE

it like a mark. Take the case of a man who puts a well-defined charcoal line between his eyes, to indicate a violent temper, and imagine that from this permanently ill-tempered face some repartee requires a laugh. What a horrible grimace will result! And how shall that false forehead, shining like a billiard-ball, show a wrinkle when the old man loses his temper?

In a modern psychological drama, where the soul's most delicate emotions should be reflected from the face rather than through gestures and noise, it would probably be best to experiment with powerful side-lights, on a small stage, and with no grease-paint for the actors, or at any rate the minimum possible.

If we could then abolish the visible orchestra with the disturbing glare of its lamps, and its faces turned towards the audience; if we could have the stalls raised so that the spectator's eye would be above the level of the actor's knee; if we could do away with the boxes with their giggling diners and supper-girls; if, in addition, we could have complete darkness in the auditorium throughout the performance, and, most important of all, a *small* stage and a *small* house: — then perhaps a new dramatic art might arise, and at any rate the theatre might again become an institution for the enjoyment of cultured people. While waiting for such a theatre I suppose we may as well go on writing 'for stock,' and get ready the repertoire of the future.

I have made an attempt! If it is a failure, well, there is plenty of time to try again!

SCENE: *A large kitchen. The ceiling and side walls are concealed by hangings and draperies. The wall at the back runs obliquely up the stage from the left. On it, to the left, are two shelves with utensils of copper, brass, iron and tin. The shelves are fringed with crinkled paper. A little to the right, three-fourths of the great arched doorway, with two glass doors, through which are seen a fountain with a Cupid, lilac shrubs in flower, and the tops of some Italian poplars.*

*To the left of the stage is the corner of a large tiled range and a part of the chimney-hood.*

*On the right protrudes one end of the servants' dinner table of white pine, with some chairs beside it.*

*The stove is decorated with birch boughs: the floor strewn with twigs of juniper.*

*On the end of the table is a large Japanese spice-jar filled with lilac blossoms.*

*A refrigerator, a scullery table and a washstand.*

*A large, old-fashioned bell above the door, and on the left of the door a speaking-tube.*

KRISTIN is standing by the stove, frying something in a frying pan. She is wearing a light cotton dress and a cook's apron. JEAN comes in, dressed in livery and carrying a pair of large riding boots, with spurs, which he puts down on a conspicuous part of the floor.

JEAN. Lady Julie's mad again to-night: absolutely mad!

KRISTIN. So you're back again, are you?

JEAN. I took the Count to the station, and as I passed the barn on my way home I went in and danced, and who should I see but the young lady leading the dance

## LADY JULIE

with the gamekeeper. But the moment she catches sight of me she rushes straight up to me and asks me to dance the ladies' waltz. And then she danced like – well, I've never seen the like of it. She's mad!

KRISTIN. That she's always been, but never like this last fortnight since the engagement was broken off.

JEAN. I wonder what really was at the bottom of that affair! A fine fellow, wasn't he, though not well off. Oh, but they're so full of whims! (*Sits down at the end of the table.*) Anyhow, it's curious that a young lady – ahem! – should prefer to stay at home with the servants – eh? – rather than go with her father to see her relations?

KRISTIN. I expect she feels a bit shy after that set-to with her young man.

JEAN. Very likely! Anyhow, he could hold his own – that young fellow! Do you know how it happened, Kristin? I saw it myself, though I didn't want to let them see I did.

KRISTIN. You saw it, did you?

JEAN. I did. They were in the stable yard one evening and our young lady was 'training' him, as she called it. D'you know what that was? Why, she was making him jump over her riding-whip the way you teach a dog to jump. Twice he jumped, and got a cut with the whip each time; but the third time he snatched the whip from her and broke it into a thousand pieces. And then he went off.

KRISTIN. So that's how it was! Well, I never!

JEAN. Yes, that's how that was! But what have you got for me there, Kristin?

KRISTIN (*putting what she has cooked on a plate and placing*

## LADY JULIE

*it in front of JEAN*). Oh, just a little kidney that I cut from the veal!

JEAN (*smelling the food*). Splendid! My great *délice*! (*Feeling the plate*.) But you might have warmed the plate!

KRISTIN. Well, if you aren't more fussy than the Count himself – when you give your mind to it! (*Pulls his hair gently*.)

JEAN (*annoyed*). Don't go pulling my hair! You know how sensitive I am.

KRISTIN. There, there now! It was only love, you know! (*JEAN begins to eat. KRISTIN opens a bottle of beer*.)

JEAN. Beer? On Midsummer Eve? No, thank you! I've got something better than that! (*Opens a drawer in the table and takes out a bottle of red wine with yellow seal*.) Yellow seal, you observe! Now give me a glass. A wine-glass, of course, when one drinks *neat*!

KRISTIN (*goes back to the stove and puts a small saucepan on it*). Lord help the woman who gets *you* for a husband! Such an old fusser!

JEAN. Oh nonsense! You'd be glad enough to get such a smart fellow as I am! I don't think it's done you much harm *my* being known as your sweetheart! (*Tastes the wine*.) Fine! Remarkably fine! Might be just a shade warmer! (*Warms the glass in his hands*.) We bought this at Dijon, four francs the litre – without the bottle; and then there was the duty! – What are you cooking there – making that infernal smell?

KRISTIN. Oh, some devil's stuff Lady Julie wants for Diana.

JEAN. You should be more refined in your language,

## LADY JULIE

Kristin! But why should you have to cook for that cur on the eve of a holiday? Is the dog ill then?

KRISTIN. Yes, she's ill! She's been sneaking about with the pug at the lodge – and now things have gone wrong – and that, you see, the young lady won't hear of.

JEAN. The young lady is too stuck up in some ways and not enough in others – just like the Countess was while she was alive. She was at home in the kitchen and the cow-sheds, yet she would never go out driving with one horse only; she went about with dirty cuffs, but she would have the coronet on the buttons. – Our young lady – to come back to her – doesn't take any care about herself or her person. I might almost say that she's not refined. When she was dancing in the barn just now, she snatched away the gamekeeper from Anna's side and actually asked him to dance with her. We shouldn't do that sort of thing ourselves; but that's what happens when the gentry try to behave like common people: they *become* common. But she's a fine woman! Magnificent! Ah, what shoulders? And – and so on!

KRISTIN. Now then, don't overdo it! Clara has dressed her, and I know what she says.

JEAN. Oh, Clara! You're always jealous of each other! But I've been out riding with her. . . . And look at her dancing!

KRISTIN. Now then, Jean! Won't you dance with me when I'm ready?

JEAN. Of course I will.

KRISTIN. Promise?

JEAN. Promise? If I say I will, of course I will! Well,

## LADY JULIE

thanks for the supper. It was very nice! (*Replaces the cork in the bottle.*)

JULIE (*in the doorway, speaking to some one outside*). Go on: I'll join you in a minute.

(*JEAN slips the bottle into the drawer and rises respectfully. JULIE comes in and goes up to KRISTIN by the looking-glass.*)

Well, have you finished it?

(*KRISTIN makes a sign that JEAN is present.*)

JEAN (*gallantly*). Have the ladies some secret between them?

JULIE (*striking him in the face with her handkerchief*). Don't be inquisitive!

JEAN. Oh, what a lovely smell of violets!

JULIE (*coquettishly*). What impudence! So you're an expert in scents too, are you? Dancing you're certainly good at . . . There now, don't peep! Go away!

JEAN (*perfly, but politely*). Is it some witches' broth for Midsummer Eve you ladies are brewing? Something to tell one's fortune by in the star of fate, and so behold one's future love?

JULIE (*sharply*). You'd want good eyes to see *that*! (*To KRISTIN*). Put it into a pint bottle and cork it well. Now come and dance a schottische with me, Jean.

JEAN (*hesitating*). I don't want to be rude to anybody, but I'd promised Kristin this dance . . .

JULIE. Well, but she can have another instead – can't you, Kristin? Won't you lend me Jean?

KRISTIN. That's not for me to say. Since the young



## LADY JULIE

lady is so condescending it isn't for him to say no. Be off, now! And be thankful for the honour.

JEAN. Speaking frankly – no offence meant of course – I'm wondering if it's wise of Lady Julie to dance twice running with the same partner, especially as people here are only too ready to put their own construction on . . .

JULIE (*flaring up*). What do you mean? What sort of construction? What are you hinting at?

JEAN (*submissively*). As you won't understand I must speak more plainly. It doesn't look well to prefer one of your dependents to others who are expecting the same unusual honour . . .

JULIE. Prefer! What an idea! I'm surprised at you! I, the mistress of the house, honour the servants' ball with my presence, and now that I really do want to dance I intend to dance with some one who can guide and not make me look ridiculous.

JEAN. Just as you wish, Lady Julie! I am at your service.

JULIE (*gently*). Don't take it as a command! To-night we're happy people enjoying a holiday, and all questions of rank are set aside! Now give me your arm. Don't worry, Kristin! I shan't take your sweetheart away from you!

(JEAN offers her his arm and leads her out.)

(PANTOMIME. *Played as though the actress were really alone. When desirable she turns her back on the audience. Does not look towards the spectators. Does not hurry, as though she were afraid the audience might become impatient.*)

KRISTIN alone. *Soft violin music in the distance, in*

## LADY JULIE

*schottische* time. KRISTIN, humming the tune, clears the table where JEAN has been sitting, washes the plate at the scullery board, dries it, and puts it into a cupboard.

After that she removes her apron, takes out a small looking-glass from a table drawer and leans it against the jar of lilac on the table. Lights a candle and heats a hairpin, with which she curls her front hair.

Then she goes to the door and listens. Comes back to the table. Discovers the handkerchief which LADY JULIE had left behind; picks it up and smells it. Then she spreads it out abstractedly, pulls it straight, smooths it and folds it in four, and so on.)

JEAN (coming in alone). Well, she really is mad! The way she danced! With everybody standing behind the doors grinning at her. What do you think about it, Kristin?

KRISTIN. Oh, she's not very well just now. And that always makes her a bit queer. But won't you come and dance with me now?

JEAN. You aren't angry with me for throwing you over . . .

KRISTIN. Of course not – not for a little thing like that. Besides, I know my place . . .

JEAN (putting his arm round her waist). You're a sensible girl, Kristin, and you ought to make a good wife . . .

JULIE (comes in, unpleasantly surprised; with assumed jocularly). Well, you are a nice cavalier, running away from your lady!

JEAN. On the contrary, Lady Julie; I have, as you see, hurried back to find the one I deserted!

JULIE (changing her note). Do you know there's not a

## LADY JULIE

man that can dance like you! – But why are you in livery on a holiday evening? Take it off at once!

JEAN. Then I must ask you to go away for a moment; my black coat is hanging up here. (*Indicates the place and goes towards the right.*)

JULIE. Are you shy because of me? Just changing your coat? Go into your room then, and come back. Or you can stay here and I'll turn my back.

JEAN. With your permission, Lady Julie! (*Goes towards the right. One of his arms is visible while he changes his coat.*)

JULIE (*to KRISTIN*). Tell me, Kristin: is Jean engaged to you that he's so intimate?

KRISTIN. Engaged? Yes, if you like! We call it that.

JULIE. Call?

KRISTIN. But you've been engaged yourself, my lady, and –

JULIE. Yes, we were properly engaged –

KRISTIN. But it didn't come to anything for all that

...

(*JEAN comes in, in a black frock-coat and black bowler.*)

JULIE. *Très gentil, monsieur Jean! Très gentil!*

JEAN. *Vous voulez plaisanter, madame!*

JULIE. *Et vous voulez parler français!* Where did you learn that?

JEAN. In Switzerland, while I was acting as *sommelier* at one of the largest hotels in Lucerne.

JULIE. But you look like a gentleman in that frock-coat! *Charmant!* (*Sits down at the table.*)

JEAN. Oh, you flatter me!

JULIE (*offended*). Flatter you?

## LADY JULIE

JEAN. My natural modesty does not permit me to think that you are paying genuine compliments to one in my position. Consequently I take the liberty of assuming that you were exaggerating or, in other words, flattering.

JULIE. Where did you learn to make speeches like that? I suppose you've been to the theatre a great deal?

JEAN. I have indeed! I've been about a lot, I have!

JULIE. But you were born in this neighbourhood?

JEAN. My father was a labourer on the district attorney's estate close by. I must have seen you as a child, though you never took any notice of me!

JULIE. Well really!

JEAN. Yes, I remember one occasion especially. . . . No, I can't tell you about that!

JULIE. Oh, but do! Yes, just for once!

JEAN. No, I really cannot now! Another time, perhaps.

JULIE. Another time means no time. Is it so risky now?

JEAN. Not risky at all; but I'd rather not. Look at her there! (*Points to KRISTIN, who has fallen asleep on a chair by the stove.*)

JULIE. She'll make a nice sort of wife! Perhaps she snores too?

JEAN. No, but she talks in her sleep.

JULIE (*sarcastically*). How do you know she talks in her sleep?

JEAN (*impudently*). I've heard her!

(*A pause, during which they look at each other.*)

JULIE. Why don't you sit down?

## LADY JULIE

JEAN. I cannot take that liberty in your presence!

JULIE. But if I order you to?

JEAN. Then I obey.

JULIE. Sit down then! No, wait! Can you give me something to drink first?

JEAN. I don't know what we've got here in the refrigerator. I fancy it's only beer.

JULIE. Don't say *only* beer! My tastes are simple and I prefer it to wine.

JEAN (*takes a bottle of beer from the refrigerator and opens it; fetches a glass and a plate from the cupboard and serves the beer*). Allow me!

JULIE. Thank you! Won't you have some yourself?

JEAN. I am not very fond of beer, but if your ladyship commands . . .

JULIE. Commands? I imagine that a polite cavalier would keep his lady company.

JEAN. Very true! (*Opens a bottle and fetches a glass.*)

JULIE. Drink my health now!

(*JEAN hesitates.*)

I really believe the fellow's shy!

JEAN (*kneeling, and raising his glass with mock solemnity*). To the health of my lady!

JULIE. Bravo! Now you must kiss my shoe too, and then everything will be quite perfect.

(*JEAN hesitates. Then he takes hold of her foot boldly and kisses it lightly.*)

Splendid! You ought to have been an actor.

JEAN (*getting up*). This can't go on any longer, my lady! Somebody may come in and see us.

JULIE. What would that matter?

## LADY JULIE

JEAN. With you, my lady?

JULIE. With me.

JEAN. That won't do! It simply won't!

JULIE. I can't understand your ideas. Is it possible that you're imagining something?

JEAN. Not I: the people.

JULIE. What? That I'm in love with my valet?

JEAN. I'm not a conceited man, but one has seen such cases – and to the people nothing is sacred!

JULIE. You're an aristocrat, I suppose!

JEAN. Yes, I am.

JULIE. I'm stepping down –

JEAN. Take my advice, my lady, and don't step down! No one will believe that you step down of your own accord. People will always say that you're falling down.

JULIE. I have a higher opinion of the people than you have. Come and put it to the test! – Come! (*She holds him fast with her eye.*)

JEAN. You're very strange, you know!

JULIE. Perhaps, but so are you! Besides, everything is strange! Life, humanity, everything – slush that is whirled, whirled along the water, till it sinks, sinks! There's a dream of mine which comes back to me now and then; I remember it now. I have climbed to the top of a pillar, and am sitting there without seeing any possibility of getting down. When I look down I get dizzy, and yet get down I must, though I haven't the courage to throw myself down. I can't hold on, and I long to be able to fall; but I don't fall. And yet I have no peace till I am down, no rest till I am down, down on the ground! And if I did reach the ground I should

## LADY JULIE

JEAN (*warningly*). Lady Julie!

JULIE. Yes, *Monsieur Jean*!

JEAN. *Attention! Je ne suis qu'un homme!*

JULIE. Will you sit still! – There! Now it's out! Kiss my hand and say thank you!

JEAN (*getting up*). Lady Julie, listen to me. Kristin has gone to bed now. Will you listen to me!

JULIE. Kiss my hand first!

JEAN. Listen to me!

JULIE. Kiss my hand first!

JEAN. Very well: but you'll have only yourself to blame!

JULIE. For what?

JEAN. For what? Are you a child at twenty-five? Don't you know it's dangerous to play with fire?

JULIE. Not for me; I'm insured!

JEAN (*bluntly*). No, that you're not! And even if you are, there are inflammable stores close by!

JULIE. Yourself, I suppose?

JEAN. Yes. Not because it is I, but because I'm a young man –

JULIE. Of prepossessing appearance – what incredible conceit! A Don Juan perhaps? Or a Joseph! On my soul, I think you must be a Joseph!

JEAN. Do you think so?

JULIE. I almost fear it!

(JEAN goes boldly up to her and tries to clasp her round the waist to kiss her.)

(*Boxing his ears*). Impudence!

JEAN. Is that serious or a joke?

JULIE. Serious!

## LADY JULIE

JEAN. Then what happened just before was also serious! Your play is much too serious, and that's the danger of it! Now I'm tired of play and I beg leave to return to my work. The Count's boots must be ready in time, and it's long past midnight.

JULIE. Put those boots away!

JEAN. No. This is my work and I must do it. I never undertook to be your playfellow, and I never can be that. I consider myself too good for it!

JULIE. You are proud!

JEAN. In some ways; in other ways not.

JULIE. Have you ever been in love?

JEAN. We don't use that word, but I've been fond of several girls, and once I got ill because I couldn't have the one I wanted: ill, mark you, like the princes in the Thousand and One Nights who couldn't eat or drink from sheer love!

JULIE. Who was it?

(JEAN is silent.)

Who was it?

JEAN. You can't make me say that.

JULIE. If I ask you as an equal, as a - friend! Who was it?

JEAN. It was you!

JULIE (*sitting down*). How priceless! . . .

JEAN. Yes, if you like! It was ridiculous! That, you see, was the story which I wouldn't tell you just now, but now I will.

Do you know how the world looks from below? You don't. Like hawks and falcons, whose backs one rarely sees because they usually hover above us! I used



## LADY JULIE

to live in the labourer's cottage with seven brothers and sisters and a pig, out in the grey fields where there wasn't a single tree! But from the windows I could see the Count's park wall with apple trees above it. It was the Garden of Eden; and a multitude of frowning angels with flaming swords stood there keeping watch over it. But none the less I and some other boys found the way to the Tree of Life. – You despise me now?

JULIE. Oh, all boys steal apples.

JEAN. You may say that now, but you despise me all the same. No matter! One day I went into the Paradise with my mother to weed the onion beds. Close to the garden stood a Turkish pavilion, shaded by jasmine and overgrown with honeysuckle. I had no idea what it might be used for, but I had never seen such a beautiful building. People went in and out of it, and one day the door was left open. I crept up and saw the walls covered with pictures of kings and emperors, and there were red curtains on the windows, with fringes on them – now you understand what I mean. I – (*breaks off a lilac blossom and holds it under JULIE's nose*) I had never been inside the castle, never seen anything but the church – but this was more beautiful; and whatever course my thoughts took they always went back – to that. Then gradually arose the desire to taste, just for once, the full pleasure of – *enfin*, I crept in, saw, and admired. Then I heard some one coming! There was only one exit for members of the family, but for me there was another and I had to choose that.

(*JULIE, who has taken up the lilac blossom, lets it drop on the table.*)

## LADY JULIE

So I took to my heels, plunged through a raspberry bed, darted across some strawberry beds and came up on to the rose terrace. There I caught sight of a pink dress and a pair of white stockings – that was you. I lay down under a heap of weeds – right under it, I tell you – under prickly thistles and damp, evil-smelling earth. And I watched you going about among the roses and I thought to myself: ‘If it’s true that a thief may enter into heaven and dwell with the angels, it’s curious that a labourer’s child here on God’s earth cannot come into the castle park and play with the Count’s daughter!’

JULIE (*sentimentally*). Do you think all poor children think the same as you did then?

JEAN (*doubtfully at first, then with conviction*). All poor – yes – of course! Of course!

JULIE. It must be terrible to be poor!

JEAN (*with deep distress, much exaggerated*). Oh, Lady Julie! Oh! – A dog may lie on the Countess’s sofa, a horse be stroked on the nose by a young lady; but a servant – (*Changes his tone.*) Well, now and then you find a man with enough stuff in him to pull himself up into the world; but how often does that happen? However, do you know what I did next? I jumped into the millstream with my clothes on, was pulled out and got a thrashing. But the following Sunday, when my father and all the others went off to my grandmother’s, I contrived to stay at home. So I washed with soap and hot water, put on my best clothes and went to church in order to see you! I saw you and went home, determined to die; but I wanted to die beautifully and comfortably, without pain. And then I remembered that it was

## LADY JULIE

dangerous to sleep under an elder bush. We had a large one, just then in bloom. I robbed it of all it had, and then made my bed in the oats-chest. Have you noticed how smooth oats are? Soft to the touch as the human skin! . . . Well, I shut the lid and closed my eyes; then fell asleep, and woke up feeling really ill. But I didn't die, as you see.

What I wanted – I really don't know! There was no hope of winning you – but you were a sign to me of the hopelessness of getting out of the circle in which I was born.

JULIE. You tell stories charmingly, you know! Did you ever go to school?

JEAN. Only for a short time. But I've read a good many novels and gone to theatres. Besides that, I've listened to the conversation of refined people; and I've learnt most from them.

JULIE. So you stand about listening to what we say!

JEAN. Certainly! And I've heard a lot, I have, sitting on the coach-box or rowing the boat. Once I heard your ladyship and a girl friend . . .

JULIE. Oh? And what did you hear?

JEAN. Well, it's not very easy to tell you; but I must say I was rather surprised; I couldn't think where you'd learnt all those words. Perhaps, at bottom, there isn't so much difference as one thinks between one human being and another.

JULIE. For shame! We don't behave like you when we're engaged.

JEAN (*looking hard at her*). Is that a fact? Really, I shouldn't bother to make yourself out so innocent. . . .

## LADY JULIE

JULIE. The man I gave my love to was a scoundrel.

JEAN. That's what you always say – afterwards.

JULIE. Always?

JEAN. Always, I believe – since I've heard the expression several times before on similar occasions.

JULIE. What sort of occasions?

JEAN. Like the one in question! The last time . . .

JULIE (*getting up*). Stop! I won't hear any more!

JEAN. *She* didn't want to either – strange to say. Now may I go to bed?

JULIE (*gently*). Go to bed on Midsummer Eve?

JEAN. Yes! Dancing with the riff-raff up there doesn't really amuse me.

JULIE. Get the key of the boat-house and take me out for a row on the lake; I want to see the sunrise!

JEAN. Is that prudent?

JULIE. That sounds as if you were anxious about your reputation!

JEAN. Why not? I don't want to be ridiculous. I don't want to be discharged without a character when I want to settle down. Moreover, I feel that I am more or less under an obligation to Kristin.

JULIE. Oh, so it's Kristin then. . . .

JEAN. Yes, but you too. Take my advice and go to bed!

JULIE. Am I to obey you?

JEAN. For once; for your own sake! I implore you! The night is far gone, sleepiness intoxicates, and one's head grows hot! Go to bed! Besides, if I'm not mistaken, I hear the people coming this way to look for me. If they find us here, you're lost!

## LADY JULIE

(*The CHORUS approaches, singing:*)

Two wives from the woods came walking,  
Tridiridi-ralla tridiridi-ra.  
And one had a hole in her stocking,  
Tridiridi-ralla-la.

Their talk was of hundreds of dalers,  
Tridiridi-ralla tridiridi-ra.  
Yet between them they'd hardly a daler,  
Tridiridi-ralla-ra.

No garland need I give you,  
Tridiridi-ralla-tridiridi-ra.  
For another, alas, I must leave you,  
Tridiridi-ralla, ra!

JULIE. I know my people and I love them, as they love me. Let them come and you'll see!

JEAN. No, Lady Julie, they don't love you. They accept your food, but they spit at it! Believe me! Listen to them: just listen to what they're singing! No, don't listen to them!

JULIE. What are they singing?

JEAN. Some scurrilous verses! About you and me!

JULIE. Abominable! How disgraceful! And how sneaking!

JEAN. The rabble are always cowardly. In this sort of fight one can only run away!

JULIE. Run away? But where? We can't go out by the door! And we can't get into Kristin's room!

JEAN. Very well! Into mine then! Necessity knows no law. Besides, you can trust me, your true, sincere and respectful friend!

## LADY JULIE

JULIE. But think—think if they should look for you there!

JEAN. I shall bolt the door, and if they try to break in I shall shoot! Come! (*On his knees.*) Come!

JULIE (*meaningly*). Will you promise? . . .

JEAN. I swear it!

(*JULIE goes out quickly to the right. JEAN follows her excitedly.*)

(*BALLET. The peasants enter, in holiday attire, with flowers in their hats. A fiddler leads the procession. A barrel of small beer and a keg of spirits, decorated with greenery, are placed on the table. Glasses are fetched and drinking begins. Then they form a circle and sing and dance to the tune 'Two wives from the woods came walking.'*)

*When this is finished they leave the room, singing.*

*JULIE comes in alone; gazes on the havoc made of the kitchen; claps her hands together. Then she takes her powder-puff and powders her face.)*

JEAN (*comes in excitedly*). There, you see! And you heard too! Do you think it possible to remain here?

JULIE. No, I do not. But what are we to do?

JEAN. Run away, travel, far away from here!

JULIE. Travel? Yes, but where?

JEAN. To Switzerland, to the Italian lakes; you've never been there, have you?

JULIE. No. Is it nice there?

JEAN. Ah! It's eternal summer—orange trees, laurels! Glorious!

JULIE. But what are we to do when we get there?

JEAN. I'll start a hotel: first-class accommodation and first-class customers.

## LADY JULIE

JULIE. A hotel?

JEAN. Yes, there's life for you! New faces continually, and new languages; not a minute's leisure for brooding or nerves; no worrying about something to do – the work makes itself: bells that ring night and day, whistling trains and 'buses coming and going; and gold pieces rolling along the counter. There's life for you!

JULIE. Yes, that is life. And what about me?

JEAN. Mistress of the house, chief ornament of the firm. With your looks . . . and your style – oh – success is a certainty! Magnificent! You sit like a queen in the office and set your slaves in motion by pressing an electric button; the guests file past your throne and shyly place their treasures on your table – you can't imagine how people tremble when they get a bill in their hands – I'll salt the accounts and you shall sugar them with your prettiest smiles – ah, let's get away from here. (*Takes a time-table out of his pocket.*) At once, by the next train! We're in Malmö at six-thirty; Hamburg eight-forty in the morning; Frankfort-Basle in a day, and Como, by the St. Gothard line, in – let me see – three days. Three days!

JULIE. That's all very well! But, Jean – you must give me courage – tell me that you love me! Come and put your arms round me!

JEAN (*hesitating*). I should like to – but I dare not! Not again in this house. I love you, Lady Julie! Without doubt – can you doubt it?

JULIE (*shyly, with true womanly feeling*). Lady Julie! Call me Julie! There are no longer any barriers between us two! – Call me Julie!

JEAN (*uneasily*). I cannot! There are barriers still

## LADY JULIE

between us, as long as we stay in this house. There is the past, there is the Count – I have never met anyone for whom I felt such respect: I've only to see his gloves lying on a chair and I feel small: I've only to hear his bell upstairs and I start like a shying horse: and now when I see his boots standing there so stiff and proud, I feel my back beginning to bend! (*Kicks the boots.*) Superstition, prejudice, taught us from childhood – but as easily forgotten again. Only come to another country, a republic, and they'll bow to the earth before my porter's livery. Bow to the earth, I tell you! But *I* shall not! I am not born to bow to the earth; for there's stuff in me – there is character; and if only I can set my foot on the first branch you shall see me climb! To-day I'm a valet, but next year I shall be a man of property: in ten years I shall be living on my own dividends: and then I shall go to Roumania, get myself an order, and may – mark you, I say *may* – end my days as a Count!

JULIE. Splendid! Splendid!

JEAN. Oh, in Roumania one can buy the title, so you'll be a Countess after all! My Countess!

JULIE. What does all that matter to me? I'm putting it all behind me now! Say that you love me, or – if you don't – what am I?

JEAN. I'll say it, a thousand times – later on! But not here! And above all, no sentiment, if everything is not to be lost! We must take the matter coolly like sensible people. (*Takes a cigar, cuts it and lights it.*) Now you sit there, and I'll sit here; then we can talk as if nothing had happened.

JULIE (*in despair*). My God! Have you no feelings, then?



## LADY JULIE

JEAN. I had to invent something; it's always the pretty speeches that capture women!

JULIE. Scoundrel!

JEAN. Filth!

JULIE. And now you've seen the hawk's back!

JEAN. Not exactly its *back*!

JULIE. And I was to be the first branch . . .

JEAN. But the branch was rotten . . .

JULIE. I was to be the signboard at the hotel . . .

JEAN. And I the hotel . . .

JULIE. Sit inside your office, lure your customers, falsify their accounts . . .

JEAN. I was to do that.

JULIE. To think that a human soul could be so steeped in filth!

JEAN. Wash it then!

JULIE. You lackey, you menial, stand up when I'm speaking!

JEAN. You mistress of a menial, you lackey's wench, hold your jaw and get out! Are you the one to come and lecture me on my coarseness? No one in my class has ever behaved so coarsely as you have to-night. Do you think any servant girl attacks a man as you did? Have you ever seen a girl of my class throw herself at a man like that? I have only seen that sort of thing among beasts and fallen women!

JULIE (*crushed*). That's right; strike me; trample on me; I deserve it all. I'm a vile creature; but help me! Help me out of this, if there *is* any way out!

JEAN (*more gently*). I've no wish to lower myself by denying my own share in the honour of being the seducer. But do you imagine that anyone in my posi-

## LADY JULIE

tion would have dared to look at you if you hadn't invited it yourself? Even now I am astounded . . .

JULIE. And proud . . .

JEAN. Why not? Though I must confess the conquest was too easy to carry me off my feet.

JULIE. Go on striking me!

JEAN (*getting up*). No! Rather forgive me for what I have said! I don't strike the defenceless – least of all a woman. I can't deny that in one way I am glad to have discovered that what dazzled us below was merely tinsel: to have discovered that the hawk's back, too, was only grey, that the delicate complexion was mere powder, that the polished nails might have black edges, that the handkerchief was dirty, scented though it was! . . . On the other hand, it pains me to find that what I myself was striving to reach was not something higher, something more substantial; it pains me to see you sunk to a level far below that of your own cook; it pains me like the sight of autumn flowers lashed to pieces by the rain and turned into mud.

JULIE. You speak as if you already stood above me?

JEAN. And so I do. I could make you a Countess, you see, but you could never make me a Count.

JULIE. But I am the child of a Count; you can never be that!

JEAN. True; but I might be the father of Counts – if . . .

JULIE. But you are a thief. I am not that.

JEAN. There are worse things than being a thief! There are lower levels than that! Besides, when I serve in a house I regard myself to some extent as a member of the family, or one of the children; one doesn't count

## LADY JULIE

it theft when children filch a berry from loaded bushes! (*His passion wakens again.*) Lady Julie, you're a splendid woman, far too good for a man like me! You've been the prey of an intoxication, and you want to conceal the mistake by persuading yourself that you love me! That you do not do, unless possibly my outward appearance attracts you – in which case your love is no higher than mine – but I could never be content with being a mere animal for you, and your love I can never awaken.

JULIE. Are you sure of that?

JEAN. You mean that it might be possible! – My ability to love you, yes, without doubt! You are beautiful, you are refined – (*Goes up to her and takes her hand.*) Cultivated, amiable when you like, and the flame that is roused by you in a man will probably never be quenched. (*Puts his arm round her waist.*) You're like mulled wine with strong spices in it, and a kiss from you . . . (*He tries to lead her out; but she frees herself gently.*)

JULIE. Leave me! You won't win me in that fashion!

JEAN. *How* then? – Not in that fashion! Not by caresses and pretty speeches; not by thought for the future, by saving you from disgrace! *How* then?

JULIE. How? How? I don't know. Not in any way! I loathe you as I loathe rats, but I can't escape you!

JEAN. Escape *with* me!

JULIE (*drawing herself up*). Escape? Yes, we must escape! But I'm so tired! Give me a glass of wine.

(*JEAN fills her glass.*)

(*Looking at her watch*). But we must talk first; we've

## LADY JULIE

still a little time left. (*Drinks the wine and holds out her glass for more.*)

JEAN. Don't drink so immoderately – it will go to your head!

JULIE. What if it does?

JEAN. What if it does? It's vulgar to get drunk! What was it you wanted to say?

JULIE. We must fly! But we must talk first; that is, I must talk; so far you have done all the talking. You've told me the story of your life; now I want to tell you mine; then we shall know each other thoroughly before we begin our travels together.

JEAN. One moment! Pardon me! Consider whether you won't regret it afterwards when you've laid bare the secrets of your life.

JULIE. Aren't you my friend?

JEAN. Yes, sometimes. But don't rely on me.

JULIE. You don't really mean that. Besides, my secrets are already common property. You see, my mother was of plebeian birth, the daughter of quite simple people. She was brought up according to the theories of her time as regards equality, woman's liberty and all that sort of thing; and she had a decided objection to marriage. So when my father made love to her, she said she could never marry him, but . . . she did marry him all the same. I came into the world – against my mother's wishes, so far as I can make out. My mother wanted to bring me up as a child of nature: I was even to learn everything a boy learns, to become a proof that a woman is as good as a man. I had to go about dressed as a boy and learn how to handle a horse; but I wasn't allowed in the cowshed. I was made to

## LADY JULIE

groom and harness and go out hunting; I even had to try and learn farming! On our estate men were given women's work to do, and women men's – the result being that the property was on the verge of ruin and we became the laughing-stock of the neighbourhood. In the end my father must have wakened from the spell; he rebelled, and everything was altered to suit his wishes. My mother was taken ill – what it was I don't know – but she frequently had convulsive attacks, used to hide in the attic or in the garden, and sometimes stayed out all night. Then came the great fire which you have heard about. The house, the stables and the farm-buildings were burnt down, and in circumstances which led one to suspect that the fire was no accident; for the disaster occurred the very day after the quarterly insurance premium had expired, and the new premium sent by my father was delayed by the messenger's carelessness, so that it arrived too late. (*She fills her glass and drinks.*)

JEAN. Don't drink any more!

JULIE. Oh, what does it matter? We had absolutely nowhere to go, and had to sleep in the carriages. My father didn't know where to get money for rebuilding the house. Then my mother advised him to try and borrow from a friend whom she had known in her youth, a brick-manufacturer near here. My father borrowed the money, without having to pay any interest, which surprised him. And so the estate was rebuilt. (*Drinks again.*) Do you know who burnt it down?

JEAN. The Countess, your mother!

JULIE. Do you know who the brick-manufacturer was?

JEAN. Your mother's lover?

## LADY JULIE

JULIE. Do you know who the money belonged to?

JEAN. Wait a little – no, I don't know!

JULIE. It was my mother's!

JEAN. The Count's, then – if there was no settlement?

JULIE. There was no settlement. My mother had a little money of her own, which she didn't want to be under my father's control, so she deposited it with – her friend!

JEAN. Who pinched it!

JULIE. Quite so! He kept it! All this comes to my father's knowledge; he can't bring an action; nor pay his wife's lover; nor prove that the money was hers! That was my mother's revenge on him for assuming control over the household. At that time he was on the point of shooting himself! Rumour said that he tried and failed. But he took a new lease of life, and my mother had to pay dearly for her conduct! You can imagine what those five years were for me! I sympathized with my father, but I took my mother's side nevertheless, because I didn't know the circumstances. From her I had learnt to mistrust and hate men – for she hated men, as you know – and I swore to her that I would never be the slave of a man.

JEAN. So you became engaged to the district attorney!

JULIE. Merely that he should be my slave.

JEAN. And that he wouldn't be?

JULIE. Oh, he wanted it all right, but he didn't get the chance. I got bored with him!

JEAN. I saw that – in the stable yard!

JULIE. What did you see?

JEAN. What I did! – How he broke off the engagement.

## LADY JULIE

JULIE. That is a lie! It was I who broke it off! Has he been saying that he did it – the scoundrel?

JEAN. Oh, I don't think he was a scoundrel! You hate men, Lady Julie?

JULIE. Yes, for the most part! But sometimes – when weakness comes – oh, the shame of it!

JEAN. You hate me too?

JULIE. Beyond words! I should like to have you killed like a wild beast.

JEAN. Just as one shoots a mad dog. Is that what you mean?

JULIE. Yes, just that!

JEAN. But now there's nothing here to shoot with – and no dog! What are we to do then?

JULIE. Travel!

JEAN. And plague each other to death?

JULIE. No – enjoy ourselves, for a day or two, for a week, for as long as one can enjoy oneself, and then – die . . .

JEAN. Die? How stupid! In that case I think it's better to start a hotel –

JULIE (*paying no attention*) – by Lake Como, where the sun is always shining, where the laurels are green at Christmas and the oranges glow.

JEAN. Lake Como is a rainy hole, and I never saw any oranges there except at the grocer's. But it's a good place for strangers, as there are lots of villas to be let to loving couples, a most paying industry – do you know why? Why, because the contract is for six months and they leave after three weeks!

JULIE. Why after three weeks?

JEAN. They quarrel, of course! But the rent has to be

## LADY JULIE

paid just the same! Then one lets again. So it goes on and on, for there's love enough – even if it doesn't last very long!

JULIE. You don't want to die with me?

JEAN. I don't want to die at all! Not only because I am fond of life but because I regard self-murder as a crime against the Providence which has given us life.

JULIE. You believe in God – you?

JEAN. Certainly I do! And I go to church every other Sunday. – And now, to tell the truth, I'm tired of all this and I'm going to bed.

JULIE. Indeed! And you think I shall be content with that? Do you know what a man owes the woman he has brought to shame?

JEAN (*takes out his purse and throws a silver coin on the table*). There you are! I don't want to have any debts!

JULIE (*pretending not to notice the insult*). Do you know what the law lays down . . .

JEAN. Unfortunately the law lays down no penalty for the woman who seduces a man!

JULIE. Do you see any way out other than going abroad, marrying, and then getting a divorce?

JEAN. And suppose I refuse to enter into this *mésalliance*?

JULIE. *Mésalliance* . . .

JEAN. Yes, for me! For, mark you! I'm better bred than you are; my pedigree contains no woman guilty of arson!

JULIE. Can you be sure of that?

JEAN. You can't be sure of the opposite, since we have no family records – except at the police-station! But your family records I have seen in a book on the draw-



## LADY JULIE

ing-room table. Do you know who the founder of your family was? A miller who let the king sleep with his wife one night during the Danish war. I have no ancestors of that sort! I haven't any ancestors at all, but I can become one myself!

JULIE. That's what I get for opening my heart to one who is unworthy of it, for sacrificing the honour of my family.

JEAN. Dishonour! – Now what did I tell you? People shouldn't drink – it makes them garrulous! And one must *not* be garrulous!

JULIE. Oh, how I regret what has happened! – how bitterly I regret it! – And if you had only loved me!

JEAN. For the last time – what do you mean? Do you want me to weep, to jump over your riding-whip, to kiss you? Do you want me to lure you away to Lake Como for three weeks, and then? . . . What am I to do? What do you want? This is getting rather painful! It always does when one goes and sticks one's nose into women's affairs! Lady Julie! I can see that you're unhappy: I know that you're suffering: but I cannot understand you. *We* don't have any of these whims; *we* don't hate one another! We make love for fun when our work gives us time; but we don't have time all day and all night, as you do! I think you're ill; I'm sure you're ill.

JULIE. Then you must be kind to me; and now you *are* talking like a human being.

JEAN. Yes, but be human yourself! You spit on me, and then forbid me to wipe it off – on you!

JULIE. Help me, help me! Only tell me what to do – where to go!

## LADY JULIE

JEAN (*sleepily*). What's the gospel for the day?

KRISTIN. Something about the beheading of John the Baptist, I expect!

JEAN. Awfully long affair that's sure to be! – Look out, you're choking me! – Oh, I'm so sleepy, so sleepy!

KRISTIN. Yes: what have you been doing, sitting up all night? Why, you're quite green in the face!

JEAN. I've been sitting here talking to Lady Julie.

KRISTIN. She doesn't know what's proper, that creature! (*A pause.*)

JEAN. I say, Kristin!

KRISTIN. Well?

JEAN. It's queer anyhow, when one comes to think of it! She!

KRISTIN. What is so queer?

JEAN. Everything! (*A pause.*)

KRISTIN (*looking at the glasses standing half empty on the table*). Have you been drinking together too?

JEAN. Yes!

KRISTIN. For shame! – Look me in the face!

JEAN. Yes!

KRISTIN. Is it possible? *Is it possible?*

JEAN (*after consideration*). Yes! It is!

KRISTIN. Faugh! I could never have believed it! Shame! Shame!

JEAN. Surely you're not jealous of her?

KRISTIN. No, not of her! If it had been Clara or Sophy, I'd have scratched your eyes out! – Yes, that's how it is: why, I don't know! Oh, but it really was disgusting!

JEAN. Are you angry with her then?

KRISTIN. No, with you! It was wrong, very wrong!

## LADY JULIE

Poor girl! No, I tell you I won't stop in this house any longer – where one can't feel any respect for the people in it.

JEAN. Why should one feel respect for them?

KRISTIN. Yes, tell me that, my artful young fellow! But you wouldn't like to be in the service of people who don't live decently, would you? Eh! It lowers one, I think.

JEAN. Yes, but isn't it some consolation to find that the others aren't one scrap better than we are?

KRISTIN. No, I don't think so; for unless they *are* better, there's no standard for us to aim at, so as to better ourselves. And think of the Count! Think of all the sorrow he's had in his life! No, I won't stay here any longer! With a fellow like you too! If it had been the district attorney: if it had been somebody a little higher . . .

JEAN. What's that you say?

KRISTIN. Yes, yes! You may be all right in your own way, but there *is* a difference between one class and another all the same. No, this is a thing I can never get over. To think that a young lady who was so proud, so bitter against men, should go and give herself – and to such a man! She who almost had poor Diana shot for running after the lodge-keeper's pug! – Just fancy! But I won't stay here any longer; on the twenty-fourth of October I quit.

JEAN. And then?

KRISTIN. Well, talking of that, it's about time you looked round for a job, if we are going to marry after all.

JEAN. Yes, but what sort of a job? I can't get a place like this when I'm married.

## LADY JULIE

KRISTIN. Of course not! But I suppose you could take a hall-porter's job, or try for a place as commissionaire in some institution. Government rations are scanty, but they're safe, and there's a pension for the widow and children . . .

JEAN (*with a grimace*). That's all very fine, but it isn't in my line to start thinking so soon about dying for the sake of wife and children. I must admit that I really had slightly higher views.

KRISTIN. Your views indeed! Yes, and your duties too! Don't you forget them!

JEAN. Don't you go irritating me, talking about duties! I know well enough what I ought to do, without your telling me! (*Listens to some sound outside.*) However, we've plenty of time to think over that. Now go and get ready and we'll go to church.

KRISTIN. Who's that walking about upstairs?

JEAN. I don't know, unless it's Clara.

KRISTIN (*going out*). Surely it can't be the Count's come home without anybody hearing him?

JEAN (*frightened*). The Count? No it can't be him, or he'd have rung.

KRISTIN (*going out*). God help us! I've never seen the like.

(*The sun has now risen and is shining on the tree-tops in the park; the light moves slowly till it falls obliquely through the windows. JEAN goes to the doorway and makes a sign.*)

(*JULIE comes in in travelling dress, carrying a small birdcage covered with a towel. She places it on a chair.*)

JULIE. I'm ready now.

## LADY JULIE

JEAN. Hush! Kristin's awake.

JULIE (*extremely nervous during the following scene*). Did she suspect anything?

JEAN. She knows absolutely nothing! But, good heavens, what a sight you are!

JULIE. A sight? In what way?

JEAN. You're as pale as a corpse, and – pardon me, but your face is dirty.

JULIE. Let me wash then! – There! (*Goes to the basin and washes her hands and face.*) Give me a towel! Oh – there's the sun rising!

JEAN. And then the troll bursts!

JULIE. Yes, there've been trolls about to-night! Now, Jean! Come with me: I've got the money.

JEAN (*doubtfully*). Enough?

JULIE. Enough to begin with! Come with me! I can't travel alone to-day. Think of it – midsummer day, in a stuffy train, crowded with masses of people all staring at one; standing at stations when one wants to fly. No, I can't do it, I can't do it! And then memories will rise: childhood's memories of midsummer days with the church decked in green – birch leaves and lilac: dinner at the table spread for relations and friends: after dinner the park, with dancing, music, flowers and games! Ah, one may fly and fly, but one's memories follow in the luggage van, and remorse, and the pangs of conscience.

JEAN. I'll come with you – but at once, before it's too late. This moment!

JULIE. Go and get ready then! (*Takes up the cage.*)

JEAN. No luggage though! That would betray us!

JULIE. No, nothing at all! Only what we can take in the carriage with us.

## LADY JULIE

JEAN (*who has got his hat*). What on earth have you got there? What is it?

JULIE. Only my greenfinch. I don't want to leave her behind!

JEAN. Well, I'm blowed! So we're to take a bird-cage with us, are we? You must be mad! Drop that cage!

JULIE. The only thing of mine I'm taking with me from my home: the only living creature that loves me since Diana proved faithless! Don't be cruel! Let me take her with me!

JEAN. Drop that cage, I tell you – and don't talk so loud! Kristin can hear us!

JULIE. No, I can't leave her in strange hands! I'd rather you killed her!

JEAN. Give me the little beast, then, and I'll wring its neck!

JULIE. Very well, but don't hurt her! Don't – no, I cannot!

JEAN. Bring it here; I can!

JULIE (*takes the bird out of the cage and kisses it*). Oh, my little Serine, must you die then and leave your mistress?

JEAN. Please don't let's have any scenes; your life, your whole future is at stake! Quick now! (*Snatches the bird from her; carries it to the chopping-block and picks up the kitchen chopper. LADY JULIE turns her head away.*) You should have learnt how to kill chickens instead of revolver-shooting. (*Brings down the chopper.*) Then you wouldn't faint at the sight of a drop of blood!

JULIE (*screaming*). Kill me too! Kill me! You who can butcher an innocent creature without a quiver! Oh, how I hate you, how I loathe you! There is blood between us! I curse the hour when I first saw you; I

## LADY JULIE

curse the hour when I was conceived in my mother's womb!

JEAN. Oh, what's the good of your cursing? Let's go!

JULIE (*goes to the chopping-block, as though she were dragged there against her will*). No, I won't go yet; I cannot . . . I must see . . . Hush! There's a carriage outside. (*Listens to the sounds outside, without taking her eyes off the block and the chopper.*) So you think I can't bear the sight of blood! You think I'm so weak . . . Oh, how I should love to see your blood, your brains on a chopping-block – to see your whole sex swimming in a sea of blood, like that poor creature. . . . I believe I could drink out of your skull; I would gladly bathe my feet in your breast; I could eat your heart roasted whole! You think I am weak; you think I love you because the fruit of my womb thirsted for your seed; you think I want to carry your offspring beneath my heart, to nourish it with my blood – to bear your child and take your name! By the way, what *is* your name? I've never heard your surname – probably you haven't got one. I should be 'Mrs. Gate-keeper,' or 'Madam Dunghill' – you dog who wear my collar; you lackey with my crest on your buttons! I to share you with my own cook, to be the rival of my own servant! Oh! Oh! Oh! You think I'm a coward and want to run away! No, now I'm going to stay – blow wind, come wrack! My father will come home . . . find his desk broken open . . . his money gone! Then he'll ring – that bell there . . . twice for the valet – and then he'll send for the police . . . and I shall tell everything! Everything! Oh, how lovely to have an end to it all – if only it could be the end! – And then he'll get a stroke and die! And that will be

## LADY JULIE

the end of all of us . . . and then there will be quiet . . . peace! . . . eternal rest! . . . And then the coat of arms will be broken on the coffin – the Count's line is extinct – but the valet's line will continue, in an orphan asylum . . . win laurels in a gutter, and end in a prison!

JEAN. There speaks the royal blood! Bravo, Lady Julie! Now cram the miller into his sack!

(KRISTIN comes in, dressed for church, with a hymn-book in her hand.)

(JULIE hastens up to her and throws herself into her arms, as though seeking protection.)

JULIE. Help me, Kristin! Help me against this man!

KRISTIN (*coldly and unmoved*). What a sight for a holiday morning! (*Looks at the chopping-block.*) And what a filthy mess! – What does it all mean? And all this shrieking and hullabaloo!

JULIE. Kristin! You're a woman, and you're my friend! Beware of that scoundrel!

JEAN (*rather awkward and embarrassed*). While the ladies are discussing things I'll go and shave. (*Skips out to the right.*)

JULIE. You will understand me; you will listen to me!

KRISTIN. No, I really don't understand this sort of underhand business! Where are you off to, dressed up for a journey like that? And he with his hat on! What is it? What is it?

JULIE. Listen, Kristin; listen to me and I'll tell you everything . . .

KRISTIN. I don't want to know anything . . .

JULIE. You *shall* hear me . . .



## LADY JULIE

KRISTIN. What is it about? Is it about your folly with Jean? Well, I don't worry about that at all; I've nothing to do with all that. But if you're thinking of fooling him into running off with you, why, we'll soon put a stopper on that!

JULIE (*extremely nervous*). Now try to be calm, Kristin, and listen to me! I can't stay here, and Jean can't stay here – so we must go abroad . . .

KRISTIN. H'm, h'm!

JULIE (*brightening up*). I've just got an idea, though – suppose we all three went off – abroad – to Switzerland, and started a hotel together. . . . I've got money, you see, and Jean and I would be responsible for everything – and you, I thought, could look after the kitchen. . . . Won't that be splendid? . . . Say yes, now! And come with us; then everything will be settled! . . . Now do say yes! (*Embraces KRISTIN and pats her on the shoulder.*)

KRISTIN (*coldly and thoughtfully*). H'm, h'm!

JULIE (*presto tempo*). You've never been abroad, Kristin – you must have a look round the world. You can't imagine what fun it is travelling by train – new people continually – new countries – and then we'll go to Hamburg and have a look at the Zoological Gardens on our way – you'll like that – and go to the theatre and hear the opera – and when we get to Munich we shall have the picture galleries! There are Rubenses and Raphaels there – the great painters, you know. You've heard of Munich, where King Ludwig lived – the king who went mad, you know. – And then we'll see his castle – he still has castles furnished just like they are in fairy tales – and from there it's not far to Switzerland – and the Alps! Think of the Alps covered with snow in

## LADY JULIE

the middle of summer – and oranges grow there, and laurels that are green all the year round . . .

(JEAN is seen in the right wing, stropping his razor on a strip which he holds between his teeth and his left hand; he listens aroused to the conversation and nods approval now and then.)

(Teresa prestissimo). And then we'll take a hotel – and I shall sit in the office while Jean stands and receives the guests . . . goes out shopping . . . writes letters. – There's life for you! Whistling trains, omnibuses driving up, bells ringing in the bedrooms and the restaurant – and I shall make out the bills – and I know how to salt them too. . . . You can't imagine how timid travellers are when it comes to paying bills! And you – you will sit in the kitchen as housekeeper in chief. Of course you won't do any cooking yourself – And you'll have to dress neatly and stylishly when you see people – and you, with your looks – no, I'm not flattering you – why, you'll be able to catch a husband one fine day! A rich Englishman, I shouldn't wonder – they're the easy ones to – (*slackens her pace*) catch – and then we'll get rich – and build ourselves a villa on Lake Como – of course it rains there a little occasionally – but – (*slower*) – I suppose the sun shines sometimes – however gloomy it seems – and – then – otherwise we can come home again – and come back – (*a pause*) – here – or somewhere else –

KRISTIN. Now do you believe all that yourself?

JULIE (*crushed*). Do I believe it myself?

KRISTIN. Yes!

JULIE (*wearily*). I don't know; I don't believe any-

## LADY JULIE

thing now. (*Sinks down on the bench; puts her head between her arms on the table.*) I believe in nothing! Nothing whatever!

KRISTIN (*turning towards the right, where JEAN is standing*). Aha, so you were going to run away!

JEAN (*disconcerted, putting the razor on the table*). Run away? That's putting it rather strong! You've heard the young lady's plan, and though she's tired now after being up all night, the plan can quite well be carried out!

KRISTIN. Listen to me now! Did you think I was going to be cook to that . . .

JEAN (*sharply*). Kindly use decent language when you're speaking to your mistress! Do you understand?

KRISTIN. Mistress!

JEAN. Yes!

KRISTIN. Listen! Just listen to the man!

JEAN. Yes, listen yourself – it would do you good – and talk a little less! Lady Julie is your mistress; you ought to despise yourself for the same reason that you despise her now!

KRISTIN. I've always had so much self-respect –

JEAN. That you were able to despise other people! –

KRISTIN. That I have never sunk below my station. You can't say that the Count's cook has had any dealings with the groom or the swine-herd! You can't say that!

JEAN. No, you've had to do with a fine fellow – luckily for you!

KRISTIN. Yes, he must be a fine fellow to sell the oats from the Count's stable –

JEAN. You're a nice one to talk about that – getting a

## LADY JULIE

commission on the groceries and accepting bribes from the butcher!

KRISTIN. What do you mean?

JEAN. So you can't feel any respect for your mistress now! *You* indeed!

KRISTIN. Are you coming to church now? A good sermon on your fine deeds might do you good!

JEAN. No, I'm not going to church to-day; you can go alone and confess your own misdeeds.

KRISTIN. Yes, I shall; and I shall come back with enough forgiveness to cover yours too! Our Redeemer suffered and died on the Cross for all our sins, and if we draw nigh to Him in faith and with a penitent heart He will take all our guilt upon Himself.

JEAN. Including grocery speculations?

JULIE. Do you believe that, Kristin?

KRISTIN. That is my living faith, as sure as I'm standing here; it's the faith which I learnt as a child, which I have kept from my youth upwards, Lady Julie. Moreover, where sin aboundeth, grace aboundeth also!

JULIE. Oh, if I only had your faith! Oh, if . . .

KRISTIN. Ah, but you see one can't get that without God's especial grace, and it is not given to all men to obtain that –

JULIE. Who do obtain it then?

KRISTIN. That is the great secret of the operation of grace, Lady Julie. God is no respecter of persons, but the last there shall be first . . .

JULIE. Well, but in that case He must have respect for the last?

KRISTIN (*continuing*). And it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter

the kingdom of heaven! Yes, there you have it, Lady Julie! However, I'm going now – by myself, and on my way I shall tell the groom not to let anybody have the horses, just in case they should want to get away before the Count comes back! – Good-bye! (*Goes.*)

JEAN. What a little devil! And all this because of a greenfinch!

JULIE (*wearily*). Never mind the greenfinch! – Can you see any way out of this? Any end to it?

JEAN (*after consideration*). No!

JULIE. What would you do in my place?

JEAN. In your place? Let me think! – A woman, of noble birth, fallen! I don't know – yes, now I know!

JULIE (*takes the razor and makes a gesture*). Like this?

JEAN. Yes. But I shouldn't myself – note that! There's a difference between us!

JULIE. Because you're a man and I'm a woman? What difference does that make?

JEAN. The same difference – as – between a man and a woman!

JULIE (*still holding the razor*). I should like to! But I can't! My father couldn't either, that time when he should have done it.

JEAN. No, he should *not* have done it! He had to get his revenge first.

JULIE. And now my mother gets her revenge, through me.

JEAN. Have you never loved your father, Lady Julia?

JULIE. Yes, most dearly, but I think I must have hated him too! I must have done so without being aware of it! But it was he who brought me up to despise my own sex, as half a woman and half a man! Whose

## LADY JULIE

fault is it – what has happened? My father's, my mother's, or my own? My own? But I *have* no own! I haven't a thought that I didn't get from my father, one passion that I didn't get from my mother, and this last idea – about all men being equal – that I got from *him*, my affianced husband – for that reason I call him a scoundrel! How can it be my own fault? To put the blame on Jesus, as Kristin did – no, I'm too proud to do that, and – thanks to my father's teaching – too sensible. And as to a rich man not being able to go to heaven – that is a lie; anyhow Kristin, who has money in the savings-bank, will certainly never get there! Whose fault is it? – What does it matter whose fault it is? After all, it is I who have to bear the blame, to bear the consequences

...

JEAN. Yes, but . . .

(*Two sharp rings on the bell. JULIE starts to her feet; JEAN changes his coat.*)

The Count is back! Suppose Kristin – (*Goes to the speaking-tube, taps it and listens.*)

JULIE. Has he been to his desk yet?

JEAN. It's Jean, my Lord! (*Listens. The audience cannot hear what the COUNT says.*) Yes, my Lord! (*Listens.*) Yes, my Lord! In one moment! (*Listens.*) At once, my Lord! (*Listens.*) Very good! In half an hour!

JULIE (*extremely anxious*). What did he say? My God! What *did* he say?

JEAN. He wants his boots and his coffee in half an hour.

JULIE. In half an hour then! Oh, I'm so tired; I haven't the strength to do anything: I can't repent,

## LADY JULIE

can't run away, can't stay, can't live – can't die! Help me now! Order me, and I'll obey you like a dog! Do me this last service, save my honour, save his name! You know what I *ought* to will, but cannot. . . . Will it yourself, and command me to carry it out!

JEAN. I don't know – but now *I* can't either – I don't understand – it's just as if this coat made me – I cannot order you – and now, since the Count spoke to me – why – I can't really explain it – but – oh, it's that devil the lackey working in my backbone! – I really believe if the Count came down now and ordered me to cut my throat I'd do it on the spot.

JULIE. Then pretend you're he, and I you! – You showed me how well you could act just now, when you were on your knees – you were the aristocrat then – or – have you never been to the theatre and seen the mesmerist? (JEAN *nods*.) He says to his subject: fetch the broom, and he fetches it. Then he says: sweep, and the man sweeps –

JEAN. The other man has to be asleep, though!

JULIE (*as if in a trance*). I am asleep already – the whole room seems like smoke to me . . . and you look like an iron stove . . . a stove like a man in black clothes and a tall hat – and your eyes are shining like coals when the fire is going out – and your face is a white patch like the ashes – (*the sunlight has now reached the floor and is shining upon JEAN*) – it's so warm and lovely – (*she rubs her hands as if she were warming them before a fire*) – and so light – and so peaceful!

JEAN (*takes the razor and puts it into her hand*). There is the broom! Now go, while it's light – out to the barn – and . . . (*Whispers in her ear.*)

## LADY JULIE

JULIE (*waking up*). Thank you! Now I am going, to rest! But just say – that the first can also obtain the gift of grace. Say it, even if you don't believe it.

JEAN. The first? No, I can't say that! – But stay – Lady Julie – now I know! You're no longer among the first – you're among the – last!

JULIE. That is true. – I'm among the very last; I *am* the last! Oh! – But now I can't go – tell me once more that I'm to go!

JEAN. No, now I can't either! I can't!

JULIE. And the first shall be the last!

JEAN. Don't think! Don't think! Why, you're taking away all my strength too, and making me a coward – What! I fancied I saw the bell move! – No! Shall we stuff it up with paper? – Fancy being so afraid of a bell! – Yes, but it isn't only a bell – there's someone behind it – a hand that sets it in motion – and something else that sets the hand in motion – but just stop your ears – stop your ears! Yes, and then it rings worse! Just goes on ringing till you answer it – and then it's too late! and then the police come – and then – (*The bell rings twice violently. JEAN shrinks at the sound; then straightens himself.*) It's horrible! But there's no other possible end to it! – Go!

(JULIE *walks out firmly through the door.*)



PLAYING WITH FIRE

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

★

Written 1892

Translated by

E. GLASSEN

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE FATHER, 60 years old, retired.

THE MOTHER, 58 years old.

THE SON, 27 years old, artist.

THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW, 24 years old.

THE FRIEND, 26 years old.

THE COUSIN, a girl of 20.

SCENE: *A verandah with glass roof, furnished as a drawing-room. A door into the garden and one on each side. A present-day seaside resort.*

SCENE I

(*The SON seated painting. Enter the DAUGHTER-IN-LAW, in a morning frock.*)

SON. Is he up yet?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Who, Axel? How should I know?

SON. I thought you'd gone to find out.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. You ought to be ashamed of yourself! If I didn't know you could never be jealous, I should begin to suspect you were.

SON. And if I didn't know that you could never be unfaithful to me, I should begin to look out.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. And why? Do you mean now?

SON. You heard me say '*If*'. . . . So far as our friend Axel is concerned, you know very well that there is nobody whose company I appreciate as much as his, and when, as good luck will have it, you share my sympathy for the poor torn soul, all is well.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. He is an unhappy creature, but he certainly seems a little strange sometimes. Why, for instance, did he leave us so suddenly last summer without even saying good-bye, and without taking his things with him?

SON. Yes, that was queer. I thought he was in love with cousin Adèle.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Did you? Really?

SON. Yes, but I don't think so now. Mother fancied that he had returned to his wife and child.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Knut really is dreadful. What good things have you been buying?

MOTHER. Well, I have some nice plaice. . . .

SON (*digs into the basket*). Confound it! what's this? Wild ducklings?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. They might have been a bit fatter. . . . Feel the breast of this one.

SON. For my part, I think all breasts are beautiful.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. For shame!

MOTHER. Well, you got your friend back again last night?

SON. Our friend? He is Kerstin's friend. She is quite crazy about him. Last night when he arrived, I thought they were going to rush into each other's arms.

MOTHER. You shouldn't jest like that, Knut; 'who plays with fire' . . . you know.

SON. I know, but I am too old, you see! And besides, do I look as if I had any reason to be jealous?

MOTHER. But it's not only the outside that counts. . . . What do you say, Kerstin?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. I don't know what you're talking about.

MOTHER (*taps her lightly on the cheek*). Oh you! . . . but be careful!

SON. Kerstin is as innocent as a new-born babe! And you, you old crone, don't go and corrupt her.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. You have such a horrid way of jesting, you two, that one never knows when you are serious!

SON. I am always serious.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. It looks like it, for you never laugh when you make your nasty remarks.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

MOTHER. I think you are in a bad temper this morning. . . . Didn't you sleep well last night?

SON. We didn't sleep at all.

MOTHER. For shame! Well, now I must go, or else Father will scold me.

SON. Father, where is he?

MOTHER. I suppose he is out for his morning walk with Adèle.

SON. Aren't you jealous?

MOTHER. Nonsense!

SON. But I am.

MOTHER. Of whom, may I ask?

SON. Of the old man, of course!

MOTHER. Well, Kerstin, you have come into a nice family.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Yes, if I didn't know Knut so well, and if I hadn't known that artists were a law unto themselves, I shouldn't know what to think sometimes.

SON. Quite right, I am an artist, but Father and Mother are Philistines. . . .

MOTHER (*without anger*). I think you are the Philistine; you who have never yet earned your living, and at your age too. Father was no Philistine when he built this house for a good-for-nothing like you!

SON. Well, well, one is not an only son for nothing! But you must be off now, otherwise Dad will gird at you here, and I don't want to listen. Hurry up, I see the old boy coming.

MOTHER. Then I shall go out this way. (*Goes out.*)

SON. What an infernal draught there is in this house, right through.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Yes, I think our relations might leave us in peace a little more, and to think that we must eat at their table and can't have a household of our own.

SON. Just like putting out food for the sparrows on the window-sill in order to have the pleasure of watching them eat! . . .

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*listening*). Hush! Try to cheer the old boy up, so that we may escape the morning quarrel.

SON. If only I could! But he is not always in the mood to enjoy my delicate fun.

### SCENE 3

(*The Former. Enter the FATHER, in a white waistcoat, black velvet jacket, and with a rose in his buttonhole.*

*Enter the COUSIN, who first walks around and then begins dusting.)*

FATHER (*without taking off his hat*). It's cold this morning!

SON. I can see that.

FATHER. How can you see it?

SON. I see at least that your head is cold!

(*The FATHER looks at him contemptuously.*)

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. You are impertinent, Knut!

FATHER. A fool maketh his own sorrows and the father of a fool knoweth no joy.

SON. Where do you get all your proverbs from?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*to the COUSIN*). The dusting is done for to-day, my dear.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

FATHER. By wise women the house shall be built, but a foolish woman shall pull it down by her doings.

SON. Did you hear that, Adèle?

COUSIN. I?

SON. Yes! Tell me where you can find this proverb: 'A beauteous woman without chastity is like a sow with a golden buckle on its nose.'

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Now, Knut!

FATHER. You had a visitor late last night.

SON. Did you think it too late?

FATHER. I don't think about it at all, but it seems to me that a young man might choose a more suitable time to call.

SON. Indeed, so you do think about it, after all?

FATHER. Had you invited him?

SON. What sort of an inquisition is this? Have you brought the thumbscrews with you too?

FATHER. No, that's your line. As soon as I ask a harmless question you threaten to leave; and yet you know I built this house for you in order that I might see you in the summer at least. And at my age one feels one must live for others.

SON. Nonsense, you are not old! One would think that you were out courting to-day with that rose in your buttonhole.

FATHER. There is a limit even to jesting. What do you say, Kerstin?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Oh, Knut is dreadful, and if I didn't know that he meant nothing by what he says . . .

FATHER. If he means nothing by what he says he must be an idiot! (*Looks at a newly begun portrait of the FRIEND.*) Who is this supposed to be?

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

SON. Don't you see it's the friend . . . of the family.

FATHER. That was a nasty description! He looks a wicked man – in this portrait.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. May be, but he is not.

FATHER. A man without religion is a bad man, and a man who breaks his marriage vows is a bad man.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. But he has not broken his marriage vows, he has let the court dissolve them.

FATHER. There was a time when Knut always spoke badly of your friend; how is it that he is so much taken up with him now?

SON. Because I didn't know him before, and now I have learnt to know him. Have you worked off your morning grouse now?

FATHER. Have you ever heard this proverb?

SON. I have heard all your proverbs and all your anecdotes.

FATHER. Love hath its day; hate hath its day! Good morning! (*Goes out.*)

### SCENE 4

(*The Former, excepting the FATHER.*)

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*to the COUSIN who is about to water the flowers*). The flowers have been watered, darling!

COUSIN. You shouldn't call me darling, when you hate me.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. I don't hate you, even though you are the cause of all the trouble in the family!

SON. So now *you* are at it too.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. I only wish I could feel real kindness in Adèle's work in my house, but there is always a



## PLAYING WITH FIRE

reproach and a reflection in her manner of doing me a service.

Cousin. You feel that because you neglect your house and your child. But I have only one object in all I do, and that is to be useful, so that I may not feel that I eat the bread of charity. But you! you! you!

SON (*approaches her and looks at her*). So you have a temper, have you? Then you must have passion also.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. What business is her passion of yours?

Cousin. Yes, he who is poor must have neither likes, nor dislikes, nor opinions, nor a will, nor passion. But he who marries money and is blessed in holy matrimony may do what he pleases. The table is laid for him and his bed is made; he can live as he likes, day – and night!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Do you know no shame?

Cousin. Well, you take care. My eyes are open and my ears too. (*Goes out.*)

### SCENE 5

(*The Former, excepting the Cousin.*)

SON. I believe the devil is loose to-day.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Not yet, but he may be! You beware of that girl. Have you thought what may happen if your Mother should die?

SON. Well, what then?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Then your father might marry again.

SON. Whom, Adèle?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Yes!

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

SON. Nonsense, that's easily stopped. . . . In that case she would be my stepmother and her children share the inheritance.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. People say that your father has already made a will in favour of Adèle.

SON. What do you think about their relations?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Everything, and nothing. But so much is certain, he is in love with the girl.

SON. In love, perhaps, but things have not gone beyond that.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. So much in love that even last year he was jealous of Axel.

SON. Well, can't we marry off the young couple?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Axel is not so easily tied up.

SON. Why, he is inflammable, like all widowers.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Yes, but it would be a shame. He is too good for a she-devil like that.

SON. I don't know what has gone wrong this year, but the atmosphere seems to have become suffocating. It feels as if a storm were brewing and I have such a terrible longing to go abroad.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Yes, but you can't sell your pictures, and if we go away your father will stop supplies! We'll talk to Axel about it, for he has a real gift for getting other people out of a hole, though he can't keep out of them himself.

SON. I don't know if it's wise to drag strangers into our family rows. . . .

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Do you call our only friend a stranger? . . .

SON. Well, anyhow, he's not a relation . . . besides . . . I don't know . . . the old man always says 'treat

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

your friends as if they might one day be your enemies.' . . .

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. So that's it, now you quote the old man's proverbs! He also has another disgusting proverb: 'Beware of the one you love.' . . .

SON. Yes, he is too awful once he starts.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*aside*). At last! (*Goes towards AXEL.*) Good morning, lazy-bones!

### SCENE 6

(*The Former. The FRIEND, in a light suit with a blue tie and white tennis shoes.*)

SON. 'Morning, old chap!

FRIEND. 'Morning, my friends. I hope you haven't been waiting for me.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Yes, we have.

SON. My wife was quite in despair because you couldn't sleep.

FRIEND (*embarrassed*). What do you mean, why?

SON (*to his wife*). Do you see how shy he is.

(DAUGHTER-IN-LAW *scrutinizes the FRIEND with curiosity.*)

FRIEND. It's a lovely morning, and when you have slept under the roof of two such happy people, life still smiles upon you.

SON. You think we are very happy?

FRIEND. Yes, and there is somebody who is twice as happy as you are: your father, who has both his children and his grandchild. In each of them he will live a pleasant life over again. Such a happy old age is not given to many.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

SON. Envy no man!

FRIEND. I don't. On the contrary, I enjoy seeing how pleasant life can be for some people, for it gives me hope that it may one day grow kinder to me. Especially when you think what a painful life your father has led – bankrupt and exile, and banished from his family. . . .

SON. And now he has a house and property and his son is well married, isn't that it?

FRIEND. Yes, no doubt about that.

SON. Look here, I am sure you were in love with my wife last year, weren't you?

FRIEND. No, I wouldn't say that exactly, though I was a little struck by her, but that is all over now!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. You must be very changeable.

FRIEND. Yes, fortunately – for me – I am, in my likes.

SON. But why did you rush off headlong last summer? Was it because of the other lady, or was it perhaps because of Adèle?

FRIEND (*embarrassed*). You are asking very impertinent questions.

SON. So you see, Kerstin, it was Adèle!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Surely he needn't have been so afraid of her!

FRIEND. I am not afraid of the ladies, but of my feelings for them.

SON. You have an unusual talent for wriggling. One can never get the rights of you.

FRIEND. Why should you want to get the rights of me more than anybody else?

SON. Do you know what my father just said about your portrait?

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. But Knut!

SON. He said you looked like a wicked man!

FRIEND. Then perhaps it's true to life; for the moment I really feel wicked.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. You always go about boasting of your wickedness.

FRIEND. Perhaps in order to hide it?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. No, you are a good man, much better than you want to appear, but you ought not to scare your friends away from you. . . .

FRIEND. Do I scare you?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Yes, sometimes, when I can't make you out.

SON. You should marry again, that's all!

FRIEND. All!! And who should I marry?

SON. Adèle, for instance.

FRIEND. O! don't talk of that!

SON. Ah, that touches the raw! So it was Adèle, after all?

FRIEND. And now, perhaps I had better go and change.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. No, you must certainly not change, you are quite charming as you are, and Adèle will fall in love with you. . . .

SON. You hear, my wife finds you charming?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Is it so terrible to say that his clothes suit him?

SON. At any rate, it is a little unusual for a lady to pay compliments to a man! But then of course we are unusual people.

FRIEND. Will you come with me afterwards to look for some rooms?

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. What? Aren't you going to stay with us?

FRIEND. No, that was never my intention.

SON. Hello! What's the matter now?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Why ever don't you want to stay with us?

FRIEND. Oh, I don't know. . . . I think you ought to be left in peace . . . and then we might get tired of each other.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Are you tired of us already? But really it wouldn't do for you to live down in the village. People would soon begin to talk. . . .

FRIEND. Talk? What about?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Oh, you know how they make up stories. . . .

SON. No, you simply must stay here. Let them talk! If you stay here, you are of course my wife's lover; and if you stay in the village, you have – equally of course – broken it off or else I have kicked you out! And I think it is more flattering to you to be considered my wife's lover, don't you think so?

FRIEND. You are very frank, but in this case I prefer to think of what would be most honourable for you.

SON. I am sure you have some secret reason that you don't want to tell us.

FRIEND. To be honest . . . Yes, yes! I daren't stay! You see, one so easily enters into the lives of other people and shares their joys, and in the end one's feelings are so mingled with theirs, that it is difficult to part.

SON. Why part then? Now that's settled! You stay with us! Give my wife your arm and let's go out for a walk.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

(The FRIEND, somewhat embarrassed, offers his arm to the DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.)

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. I think your arm is trembling! He's trembling, Knut!

SON. What a nice couple you make! But is he really trembling? Stay at home if you feel cold.

FRIEND. Well, if you don't mind, I'll stay here and read the papers.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. By all means, and I'll send in Adèle to keep you company! Knut and I are only going out shopping for a few minutes. (*Beckoning.*) Come here, Adèle, we've got something for you here.

### SCENE 7

(*The Former. ADÈLE.*)

FRIEND. Will you keep me company, Miss Adèle, whilst husband and wife are out shopping?

COUSIN. Keep you company? Are you afraid of the dark?

FRIEND. Yes, very!

(*The SON and DAUGHTER-IN-LAW go out.*)

FRIEND (*makes sure that they are alone*). I must not lose this chance of a little intimate talk with you, as a member of the family! May I?

COUSIN. Please do!

FRIEND. You know how much I am attached to these young people. . . . You smile, and I know what you think. It is true that, being a young woman, Mrs. Kerstin has a special attraction for me, but I assure you

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

that I keep a tight rein on my feelings so that only for a moment did I fear that they would run away with me.

COUSIN. I know that Kerstin can be fascinating, and it does not surprise me that you should be taken with her, but I can't understand that you find Knut's company so attractive. He is an insignificant creature, altogether inferior to you both in ability and in experience. . . .

FRIEND. An absolute child, you mean! But that's just why I find his company so restful after spending the whole winter among witty people. . . .

COUSIN. Playing with children is the sort of rest which palls in the long run, but you never tire of Knut, how is it?

FRIEND. I have never thought about it, but you seem to have done so. What do you think?

COUSIN. That, without knowing it, you are in love with Kerstin.

FRIEND. No, I don't think so, for I love them better when they are together, and I don't find as much pleasure in the company of either of them alone as I do when they are together. If I saw one apart from the other, he would become a stranger to me. But supposing you are right; that I am in love with Kerstin; what would that matter as long as I hide my feelings?

COUSIN. Feelings have a way of communicating themselves and fire spreads.

FRIEND. May be, but there seems to me no danger at all. You may be sure that I, who have just been through all the distress of divorce, have no inclination either to witness another or to be the cause of one — besides . . . Mrs. Kerstin is in love with her husband.



## PLAYING WITH FIRE

COUSIN. In love with him? . . . She has never been in love with him. Their love is only peaceful conjugal affection, but Knut has a passionate nature and will one day fire of strawberries and cream!

FRIEND. Listen, you must certainly have been engaged at some time.

COUSIN. Why?

FRIEND. You seem so experienced in the matter. And so I will go deeper. Apparently many things have changed here since last year.

COUSIN. For example?

FRIEND. It seems to me there is a different atmosphere, a different way of talking and thinking. Something that worries me.

COUSIN. You notice it too! Yes, they are a queer family! The father has lived in idleness on his means for ten years past; the son has no occupation, born well-to-do. They all eat, sleep, and wait for death, passing the time in the most agreeable way possible. No aim in life, no ambition, no passion, but a great deal of Ecclesiastes. Have you noticed that there is a phrase that constantly crops up in this house: 'He is a wicked man' is served up as bread to everything.

FRIEND. It is wonderful how well you express yourself and how keenly you observe.

COUSIN. Like hate, yes!

FRIEND. One who hates as you do must also be capable of love!

COUSIN. Hm!!

FRIEND. Miss Adèle, now that we have spoken ill of our friends, we must be friends ourselves, whether we like it or not—

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

COUSIN. Whether we like it or not!

FRIEND. Shake hands on that! But promise that you won't hate me?

COUSIN (*taking his hands, which he stretches towards her*). How cold your hands are!

(*The DAUGHTER-IN-LAW appears for a moment in the door.*)

FRIEND. But you are warm.

COUSIN. Hush! There is Kerstin.

FRIEND. Then we shall continue our conversation another time.

### SCENE 8

(*The Former. The FRIEND, the COUSIN, the DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.*)

*Silence on the stage.*

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. How quiet you are! Did I disturb you?

COUSIN. Not at all. But perhaps I do?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*giving a letter to the FRIEND*). Here is a letter for you. I can see it's from a lady.

(*The FRIEND looks at the letter and turns pale.*)

How pale you are! If you still feel cold, I will lend you my shawl. (*She takes off her shawl and puts it over his shoulders.*)

FRIEND. Thank you! That is warm at least!

COUSIN. Perhaps you would like a cushion under your feet?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. It would be better if you ordered

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

a fire in his room, for the damp from the sea penetrates here whenever it rains for a few days.

COUSIN. Yes, you are quite right.

FRIEND. You mustn't trouble so much on my account. Please don't!

COUSIN. Oh, it's no trouble.

### SCENE 9

(*The Former. The FRIEND, the DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.*)

*Silence.*

FRIEND. How quiet it is!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Just as when I came in. What were the secrets you were talking about?

FRIEND. I had a chance of complaining a little. One never grows out of the habit.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Well, complain to me a little too! You are unhappy? . . .

FRIEND. Chiefly because I can't work.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. And you can't work because . . .

FRIEND. Because?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Are you still fond of your wife?

FRIEND. No, not of her, but of the memory of her.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Then revive the memories.

FRIEND. Never!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Was it to her you fled last autumn?

FRIEND. No, it was not! It was to others, since you ask.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Shame!

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

FRIEND. Yes, when a gadfly bites you it is a relief to roll in the mud; it hardens the skin.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Shame on you!

FRIEND. Besides, there is consecrated dirt and unconsecrated.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. What do you mean?

FRIEND. You are a married woman and neither of us is a child. . . . I mean that in marriage one reposes in consecrated earth, but outside marriage in unconsecrated earth. But it is earth all the same.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. You don't mean to compare . . .

FRIEND. Yes, I will compare . . .

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. What sort of a woman were you married to in reality?

FRIEND. An honest girl of very good birth.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. And you loved her?

FRIEND. Far too much.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. And then?

FRIEND. We hated each other.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. But why? why?

FRIEND. That is one of the many unanswered questions of life.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. But there must have been a cause.

FRIEND. That's what I thought, but then I found that the causes were the consequences of our hate. Our differences did not bring about the rupture, but when love died, discord began. That's why the so-called loveless marriages are the happy ones.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*naïvely*). Yes, it's true, I think, that Knut and I have never had any serious difficulties.

FRIEND. You were too truthful there, Mrs. Kerstin.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Why, what did I say?

FRIEND. You said you had never loved your husband.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Loved! Well, what is love?

FRIEND (*rising*). What a question from a married woman! What does it mean to love. True, it is one of the things that one can do, but not express in words.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Was your wife pretty?

FRIEND. Yes, I thought so. She was like you as a matter of fact.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. You think that I am pretty, then?

FRIEND. I do.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. My husband didn't think so till you told him, and it is remarkable how fond of me he becomes as soon as you are here. It is as if your presence set him on fire.

FRIEND. I see, and is that the reason why he likes to see me here? And you too?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. I?

FRIEND. Perhaps we had better stop now before we go too far.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*angrily*). What do you mean, what do you think of me?

FRIEND. Nothing bad, Mrs. Kerstin! Nothing at all. Please forgive me if I hurt you!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. You hurt me terribly, but I know how badly you think of women.

FRIEND. Not at all. You are to me . . .

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. What?

FRIEND. My friend's wife, and therefore . . .

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. And if I were not?

FRIEND. Shall we stop now, Mrs. Kerstin? It seems to me as if you were not accustomed to be courted by men.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. No, I am not, and that's why I appreciate being liked! Just a little!

FRIEND. Just a little! You really ought to be a happy woman, since you make such small demands on life.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. What do you know about my demands on life?

FRIEND. Are you ambitious? Do you by any chance feel any longing to get out into the wide world, to rise and be something?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. No. nothing of that kind! But this monotonous life without work, without emotions, without anything ever happening! — Do you know I feel so desperate sometimes that I could wish for some great calamity, a plague, a fire (*whispering*), or that my child should die! . . . That I might even die myself!

FRIEND. Do you know what it is? It is idleness, a surfeit of worldly happiness, and perhaps something more.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. What?

FRIEND. Lust!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. What did you say?

FRIEND. I don't like to repeat the word, especially as I believe you heard it. But as I don't mean anything low, I don't consider that I have hurt you.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. You really are unlike everybody else, and you strike your friends in the face without their really noticing it.

FRIEND. And yet they say there are women who love to be beaten.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Now I am getting afraid of you.

FRIEND. Good. . . .

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Who are you really? What do you want? What is your purpose?

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

FRIEND. Don't be curious about me, Mrs. Kerstin.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Rude again!

FRIEND. One word of friendly advice. Have you noticed that we always quarrel when your husband is absent? That is not a good sign.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Sign of what?

FRIEND. Of lasting friendship! It shows the need of a safety-valve.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. I sometimes feel as if I could hate you!

FRIEND. That's a good sign! But have you never felt as if you could love me?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Yes, sometimes.

FRIEND. Tell me when?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. I am really tempted to be as frank as yourself. . . . Yes, when you are talking to Adèle.

FRIEND. That reminds me strongly of your husband's love, which always flames up when I am present. Miss Adèle and I seem, in short, to have as our function to be firelighters.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*laughs*). That sounded so amusing that I hadn't time to get angry.

FRIEND. You ought never to be angry, it becomes you even less than others. . . . But to change the subject, where is your husband? (*Gets up and looks out of the window. The DAUGHTER-IN-LAW also looks out of the window.*) I didn't mean to draw your attention to what is happening down there in the park. . . .

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. As if I hadn't seen Knut kiss Adèle before.

FRIEND. But it worries me that Miss Adèle cannot set

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

your husband on fire for you. There is so much that worries me this year in this house! Do you know, I believe there is something rotting here beneath the floor-boards!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. I don't notice anything. Besides it's only fun.

FRIEND. Yes, you play with matches, hunting-knives and dynamite. I think it's horrible.

### SCENE 10

(*The Former. The FATHER, with his hat on.*)

FATHER. Is Knut here?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. No, he went out to do a little shopping. Do you want him?

FATHER. Of course, since I ask for him. Have you seen Adèle?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. No, not for a long while.

FATHER (*noticing the FRIEND*). Sorry, I didn't see you. How do you do?

FRIEND. Thanks, how are you yourself?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Is there anything I can do?

FATHER. Yes, if you will be so kind! But if I disturb you, I can come back.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. As if you could disturb us.

FATHER. Well you see, it's like this, there are mosquitos in my bedroom, so I wanted to ask you to let me sleep in your attic.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. What a pity! We have just given the room to Mr. Axel!

FATHER. I see, so he is going to stay here! If I had known that, I should of course never have proposed it.



## PLAYING WITH FIRE

FRIEND. I should never have accepted the invitation to stay here, sir, if I had known that you would . . .

FATHER. No, no! I don't want to be in the way. And it isn't well to be between the bark and the tree. (*Silence.*) Has Knut begun to paint yet?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. No, he doesn't feel in the mood.

FATHER. He never has been in the mood for work, and now-a-days he is less so than ever.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Is that all?

FATHER. No, it doesn't matter! Well, don't say anything to Knut about the attic.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. I will avoid that with the greatest pleasure.

FATHER. You see, it is not at all pleasant to cause trouble . . . for nothing. It would have been different if the attic had been free, and if I had really been able to get it, but as it is now engaged. . . . Well, good-bye for the present! (*Goes out.*)

### SCENE I I

(*The Former. The FRIEND, the DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.*)

FRIEND. Will you excuse me, Mrs. Kerstin, if I leave you for a moment!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Where are you going so suddenly?

FRIEND. That . . . I can't tell you!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. You are going out to look for a room! But you mustn't!

FRIEND (*taking his hat*). Do you think I could stay in your house after being shown the door in that manner!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*seeks to take his hat away from him*). No, you mustn't go. It isn't we who have shown you the door. Besides . . .

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

### SCENE 12

*(The Former. The SON.)*

SON. What's the matter? Are you fighting, or is it a love declaration?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. It is only a lovers' quarrel! But can you imagine, Knut, this restless man will go out and look for rooms just because father wanted the attic.

SON. Wanted the attic? He wanted, of course, to see what you two were doing. And you think of leaving us for that? Down on your knees and ask the lady's pardon.

*(The FRIEND kneels down.)*

Kiss her foot! She has pretty feet, I can assure you.

FRIEND. *(Pretends to kiss her foot, then stands up)*. Now I have asked your pardon for going out to look for a room. Good-bye!

*(Goes out quickly.)*

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW *(annoyed)*. Mr. Axel!

### SCENE 13

*(The Former. The SON, the DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.)*

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. I think it is positively indecent of the old man to interfere in this way and upset the quiet of the house. Now we shall never have a moment's peace night or day.

SON. We must put up with that; but you might try to conceal your feelings a little more.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. What feelings? What do you mean? Are you perhaps . . . jealous?

SON. What! Now I am quite at a loss. I was speaking of your unfriendly feelings towards Father.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*changes front*). Don't let's speak about feelings any more. Put on this tie, so that you look like a human being. (*She takes a parcel out of her pocket.*)

SON. Must I have another tie, and a blue one into the bargain?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*ties KNUt's tie*). Yes, I suppose you don't want to go about in dirty clothes, and you should turn up your moustache.

SON. No, no, you are really too frank!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. What do you mean?

SON. Perhaps I should get a light-coloured suit too, and tennis shoes?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Yes, they would suit you splendidly, for you are getting so fat.

SON. And then I ought to grow a little thinner. And get a little careworn. Then all I shall want is a divorce.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Oh, Knut, now you are jealous!

SON. Perhaps I have said too much. But how strange that I should be jealous without envy and without malice. I like this man so much that I can't refuse him anything, anything whatever!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Anything? That's saying much.

SON. It is. It's mad, criminal, base, but if he asked my permission to stay with you, I would let him!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Now you are too dreadful. I have heard many things from your lips and have borne much. . . .

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

SON. I can't help it. Do you know I am sometimes pursued by a vision, awake and asleep: I seem to see you two together and I don't suffer. Rather it gives me pleasure, as at the sight of something very beautiful.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. But this is terrible!

SON. It may be unusual, but you must agree that it is devilish interesting all the same.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Do you know, sometimes I think that you want to get rid of me!

SON. You don't!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Yes, sometimes I do! It seems to me you are pushing Axel forward so that I may fall into his arms and you have reason for quarrelling with me, and get grounds for a divorce.

SON. Incredible! Tell me, Kerstin, have you never kissed each other?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. As I hope to be saved, no!

SON. Promise me that when the moment comes you will tell me to my face.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Knut, you're taking leave of your senses!

SON. That's just what I am. You see, I don't want to be betrayed. I am unwilling to give you up, but all the same I should prefer it.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Now suppose you stop your preaching and allow me to begin mine. What are your relations with Adèle?

SON. Only what you know and approve.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. I never approved of adultery.

SON. Aha! So that is how things stand now? What was so innocent a moment ago is now a crime!

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Just like my absolutely innocent relation to Axel a moment ago.

SON. Innocent to-day, but who knows what it will be to-morrow?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Well, wait till to-morrow then.

SON. No, I don't want to wait till it's too late.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. What do you want then?

SON. I don't know. Yes, I do—an end to all this, if there is one. We set the snare ourselves and here we are caught in it! Oh, how I hate him when he is away. But as soon as I see him again and he looks at me with his big eyes, I love him like a brother, like a sister. . . . I can quite see how you must fall under his influence, but I don't quite understand myself. It seems as if I had lived so long alone here amongst the petticoats that my feelings have become effeminate, and as if your love for him had infected me. You must love him extremely, although you don't know it.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. That's true! And now you will only shirk the blame.

SON. Just like you!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Like you!

SON. Like you. Now I'm going mad.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. I quite believe it!

SON. And you have no pity for me!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Why should I have pity for you when you plague me like this?

SON. You have never loved me!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. You have never loved me!

SON. Now we have begun a quarrel that will last until death!

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Then let us stop in time! Go and have a bathé so that you may cool down!

SON. You want to be alone.

### SCENE 14

(*The Former. The FRIEND.*)

FRIEND (*frankly and cheerfully*). Well, I have had good luck. Just as I was going out I met Miss Adèle and she knew of a room. . . .

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Has she also rooms to let?

FRIEND. She knew of a room!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. She really knows everything, that girl!

FRIEND (*to the SON, offering him a cigarette box*). Have a cigarette!

SON (*sulkily*). No, thanks!

FRIEND. What a nice tie he has!

SON. Do you think so?

FRIEND. You have been criticizing me whilst I've been away! I can see it.

SON (*upset*). Forgive me, now I must go and have a bathe. (*Goes out quickly.*)

### SCENE 15

(*The Former. The FRIEND, the DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.*)

FRIEND. What was the matter?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Jealousy.

FRIEND. Really! But there is no reason for it.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Knut pretends there is. Where is the room Adèle spoke about?

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

FRIEND (*absent-mindedly*). Adèle! Oh, opposite, at the pilot's.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. That was well calculated. Then you can see into her room. What a schemer!

FRIEND. I don't believe Adèle ever thought of such a thing.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Adèle? Have you become so intimate?

FRIEND. Mrs. Kerstin, don't raise ghosts which stir up feelings that would otherwise not come to the light of day. Don't do it, or . . .

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. You will leave, as usual. But now you mustn't leave; you have no right to do so.

FRIEND (*lighting a cigarette*). But perhaps a duty.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. If you are my friend you won't leave me unprotected in this house, where my honour is threatened. Where, with his parents approval, my criminal husband permits himself every baseness! Can you imagine that he has sunk so low in infamy that he is willing if necessary to give me up - to you!

FRIEND. That was an amiable form of jealousy. And what did you reply?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. What could I reply?

FRIEND. And you ask me that?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*hysterically*). You play with me like a cat with a mouse! You see how I am caught in your net, how I suffer and struggle to free myself, though I can't! Have pity on me. Give me a single kind look and don't sit there like an unfeeling idol, awaiting adoration and sacrifice. (*She kneels down.*) You are strong, you can control your passions, you are

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

proud, honest, but only because you have never, never loved as I love you!

FRIEND. Haven't I? Get up, Mrs. Kerstin, and go and sit down as far away as possible, in that easy chair. That's right. Now I will speak out. (*He remains sitting with the cigarette in his hand.*) I have loved you, as you call it, from the first moment I saw you. Do you remember that sunset when I first met you last year? Your husband was standing down in the valley painting when I passed. I was introduced to you and we remained talking together till we grew tired, and you sat down in the grass and invited me to sit down by your side. But the dew had fallen and I didn't want to get wet. Then you unbuttoned your coat and offered me a part of it to sit on. It seemed to me as if you had opened your arms and asked me to rest on your breast. I was very unhappy, very tired and very lonely, and it looked so warm and soft there inside your coat. I wanted to creep in under it and hide myself in your young virgin bosom. But I was ashamed when I caught in your innocent eyes a faint smile at seeing a man like me embarrassed. We met again often and often. Your husband seemed to enjoy my admiration for you. It seemed as if I had re-discovered his wife for him. I became your prisoner and you played with me. Your husband didn't hesitate to tease me openly, even in public. His egotism and cocksureness hurt me sometimes, and there were moments when I felt tempted to push him aside and try to take his place. Do you remember that afternoon when I invited you both to celebrate my birthday? You were to come later on, and when we had waited for you an hour, you came into



## PLAYING WITH FIRE

of marriage yours has been, if you can believe in friendship after a declaration of love! I am as calm as a barrel of powder beneath a percussion cap! I am as cold as a heated boiler! Ah – I have struggled, I have tortured myself, but I cannot answer for myself.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. But I can answer for myself.

FRIEND. Yes, I believe you. You who extinguish the fire as it flames up. But I live alone. – Oh, what a fiendish thought! you imagine that I could live in this house on the crumbs from the rich man's table, drink the air, devour the perfume of the flowers and still go about with a bad conscience.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. But why should you have a bad conscience when he doesn't mind having a mistress whom he kisses?

FRIEND. Don't shift the blame, don't shift the blame! Else we shall come to the slippery slope and nothing will remain but to drown ourselves. No, let us be original for once. Let us show the world an example of honesty; we will tell Knut at once when he comes in: 'We love each other; what are we to do?'

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. That is great! that is noble! Yes, let us do that, and then come what may! And we can do it with heads erect, for we shall have committed no crime!

FRIEND. And then? He will of course tell me to go!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Or else to stay.

FRIEND. On what condition? That everything should remain as it was before? No, I can't do that! 'Do you think that after this I can bear to see your caresses, to hear you close your bedroom door at night . . .? No, I can't see any end to this! But he must know about it, otherwise I can never look him in the face again. Never

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

FRIEND). I'm sorry to disturb you, I only wanted a paper. (*To DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.*) Have you seen Adèle?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. This is the fifth time to-day you have asked for Adèle.

FATHER. Have you counted them? Aren't you going to have a bathe before breakfast?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. No, not to-day.

FATHER. It's wrong of you to neglect your bathe when you are in such poor health.

(*Silence. The FATHER goes.*)

### SCENE 17

(*The Former. The FRIEND and the DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.*)

FRIEND. No, I can't stay here any longer. I can't stand it.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*approaching him and looking at him with eyes on fire*). Shall we run away?

FRIEND. No, but I must!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Then I will run away also, and we will die together.

FRIEND (*taking her in his arms and kissing her*). Now we are lost! Why did I do that? It is the end of honour and faith, the end of friendship, the end of peace! Fire from hell that burns and seres all that once was greenery and flowers! Oh!

(*They separate and sit down again on their chairs.*)

### SCENE 18

(*The Former. The SON enters quickly.*)

SON. Why are you sitting so far apart?

L.P.T.

273

S

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Because . . .

SON. And looking so upset?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Because . . . (*A long pause.*) . . .  
we love each other!

(*The SON looks at them both for a moment and then turns to  
the FRIEND.*)

Is this true?

FRIEND. It is.

SON (*sits down on a chair, somewhat crushed*). And why  
did you tell me this?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. That's the thanks you get for  
being honest!

SON. It's very original, but it's immodest.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. You yourself asked me, when the  
moment came, to . . .

SON. That's true. And the moment has come. It  
seems to me as if I knew about this before, and yet it  
is so new that I can't grasp it. Whose fault is it? No-  
body's and everybody's. What are we going to do now,  
and what's going to happen?

FRIEND. Have you anything to object to my be-  
haviour?

SON. Nothing at all. You went away when you be-  
came conscious of the danger; you refused our invitation  
to stay with us; you concealed your feelings so well that  
Kerstin thought you hated her. But why did you come  
back?

FRIEND. Because I thought my feelings were dead.

SON. That sounds probable, and I believe you. How-  
ever, we are now confronted by a fact, which we have  
neither created nor been able to prevent. We tried to

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

avoid the danger by artificial frankness; we joked about it, but it has come nearer and nearer, and now it has fallen upon us. What are we to do? Let us talk it over quietly and try to remain friends to the end. What is to be done? (*Silence.*) Nobody answers. But surely we can't sit and watch the roof burn without doing anything. (*Stands up.*) Let us think of the consequences.

FRIEND. The best thing would be for me to withdraw.

SON. Perhaps!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*frenzied*). No, you mustn't go! I shall run after you!

SON. Is this talking it over calmly?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Love is not calm. (*Approaches the FRIEND.*)

SON. At least spare me the sight of your lust. Spare my feelings a little, considering that I am comparatively innocent and shall anyhow be the sufferer.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (*puts her arms round the FRIEND's neck*). You mustn't go away!

SON (*takes his wife by the arm and separates her from the FRIEND*). Can't you behave like decent people and wait till I have gone? (*To FRIEND.*) Listen, my friend, we must come to a decision quickly, because the breakfast bell will ring in a few minutes. I see that you cannot overcome your love, whereas I perhaps can, with an effort. Life with a woman who loves another can never be harmonious and complete. I should always feel as if I were living in a state of polyandry. — So I resign my rights, but not until I have your guarantee that you will marry her.

FRIEND. I don't know how it is, but your generous

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

offer humiliates me more than the sense of guilt would have, if I had stolen her.

FRIEND. That I can well believe, but it humiliates me less to give than to be robbed. I give you five minutes to arrange the matter. So good-bye for the present. (*Exit.*)

### SCENE 19

(*The Father. The FRIEND, the DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.*)

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Well?

FRIEND. Don't you think I look ridiculous?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. No, it is not ridiculous to be honest.

FRIEND. Not always. But in this case the husband seems to be the least ridiculous! And you will come to despise me some day.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Is that all you have to say to me at a moment like this? Now, when nothing stands between us; when you can open your arms to me with a clean conscience . . . now you hesitate.

FRIEND. Yes, I hesitate, because this frankness begins to look like insolence. This honesty smacks of heartlessness . . .

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Aha!

FRIEND. And it seems to me as if the stench of putrefaction that I have noticed in this house comes from you!

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Or from you! It was you who seduced me by your shy looks, your assumed coldness and your brutality, which stirred me up like a whip! And now the seducer assumes the rôle of virtue! . . . Ah! -

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

FRIEND. Or was it not rather you who . . .

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. No, it was you, you, you! (*She throws herself on the sofa screaming.*) Help me, I am dying, I am dying! . . .

(*The FRIEND remains unmoved.*)

Won't you help me? Have you no pity? You are a monster! Can't you see that I am ill! Help me, help me!

(*The FRIEND still unmoved.*)

Send for the doctor! At least do me the service which every human being would render to a stranger. Call Adèle!

(*The FRIEND goes out.*)

### SCENE 20

(*The Former. The DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. The SON comes in.*)

SON. Well, what's the matter now? (*To the DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.*) Couldn't you agree?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. Be quiet, not another word.

SON. But why did he rush through the garden so quickly? I thought he would take the trees and the bushes along with him, and he looked almost as if his coat-tails were on fire!

### SCENE 21

(*The Former. The MOTHER, the COUSIN; later, the FATHER.*)

MOTHER. Well, are you coming in to breakfast?

SON. Yes, thanks. That's just what we want.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

MOTHER. But where is Mr. Axel? Shall we wait for him or not?

SON. We won't wait for him at all, because he has run away.

MOTHER. What a curious fellow! And yet I had fried the plaice.

*(Enter the FATHER.)*

SON *(to the FATHER)*. Now you can have the attic room if you want it.

FATHER. Thanks, but I don't want it now.

SON. It's strange how changeable you are.

FATHER. I am not the only one, I think! But he who can rule himself will rule the world.

SON. And also: Say not to your friend, 'go away and come back again.'

FATHER. That's very good, where did you find that?

SON. I got it from Kerstin.

FATHER. Kerstin, yes, have you been for your bathe, my child . . .

SON. No, she has only had a cold shower. *(The gong sounds.)*

MOTHER. Come along!

SON *(to FATHER)*. Give my wife your arm and I will take Adèle.

FATHER. No, thank you, keep Kerstin for yourself.

# THE BOND

A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT

\*

Written 1892

Translated by

ELIZABETH SPRIGGE and CLAUDE NAPIER



## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE DISTRICT JUDGE, aged 27.

THE PASTOR, aged 60.

THE BARON, aged 42.

THE BARONESS, aged 40.

THE TWELVE JURYMEN.

THE NOTARY.

THE SHERIFF'S OFFICER.

THE PARISH CONSTABLE.

THE ADVOCATE.

FARMER ALEXANDERSSON.

ALMA JONSSON, a Servant Girl.

THE DAIRYMAID.

THE THRESHER.

PEASANTS.

*A Court of Justice. At the back a door and window. Through the window is seen the churchyard and belfry. To the right a door. To the left the Bench in the form of a desk on a dais, the desk ornamented with a gilt emblem of the Sword and Scales. On both sides of the Bench, chairs and tables for the JURY. In the middle of the floor benches for the public. The walls consist of fixed cupboards, on the doors of which appear tables of market-tolls and public notices.*

SCENE I

*(The SHERIFF'S OFFICER and the CONSTABLE.)*

SHERIFF'S OFFICER. Did you ever see so many people at the Summer Assizes before?

CONSTABLE. No, not since we had the great Alsjö murder fifteen years ago.

SHERIFF'S OFFICER. Aye, and this is something of an affair, and may be just as good as a murder of both parents. It is a wretched business, anyhow, for the Baron and Baroness to be getting a divorce, but when it comes to the relatives starting to wrangle over the property and estates – well, one can imagine the fat will be in the fire! It just wanted that they should quarrel over their only child, and King Solomon himself couldn't have given judgment!

CONSTABLE. Yes, what are the rights of the case? Some say one thing and some another – but surely somebody must be to blame.

SHERIFF'S OFFICER. That's none so certain. Sometimes it is nobody's fault when two people fall out, and occasionally only one of them is to blame for the quarrel. Take my old shrew at home, for instance, she

## THE BOND

CONSTABLE. No, but they say it's a young gentleman who has just passed his examination and is now holding his first Assizes.

SHERIFF'S OFFICER. And he is said to be rather religious too. H'm!

CONSTABLE. H'm, h'm! The Assize sermon is lasting a long time to-day!

SHERIFF'S OFFICER (*lays out a great Bible on the NOTARY's table and twelve small ones on the JURYMEN's*). It can't be very long now before it's over; they will soon have been at it a whole hour.

CONSTABLE. He's a beggar to preach, the parson, when once he gets started! (*Pause.*) Will the couple appear in person?

SHERIFF'S OFFICER. Both of them. So there'll be no end of a row. (*A bell rings in the belfry outside.*) Ah, there, now it's over. Just dust the table a bit, and then I suppose we can begin.

CONSTABLE. And is there ink in the inkpots?

### SCENE 2

(*The Former. The BARON and the BARONESS.*)

BARON (*in an undertone to the BARONESS*). Then before we separate for this year, we are entirely agreed on all points. In the first place: no recriminations in Court?

BARONESS. Do you suppose that I should want to stand here and lay bare all the details of our life together in front of a pack of prying peasants?

BARON. Good! Further, you retain the child during the year of separation, with the proviso that it may visit me whenever I please, and that it is brought up accord-

## THE BOND

but on this one point we are at one, are we not, that we should separate without discord? (*To the SHERIFF's OFFICER.*) May the Baroness be permitted to wait in that room?

SHERIFF'S OFFICER. Walk in, please.

(*The BARON accompanies the BARONESS to the door on the right, then goes out himself through the door at the back.*)

### SCENE 3

(*The SHERIFF'S OFFICER, the CONSTABLE, the ADVOCATE, the SERVANT GIRL, the DAIRYMAID, the THRESHES.*)

ADVOCATE (*to the SERVANT GIRL*). Look here, my girl; I do not for a moment doubt that you did steal, but, inasmuch as your master has no evidence of it, you are innocent. And your master, having called you a thief in the presence of two witnesses, is guilty of slander. So now you are prosecutor and he defendant. Now bear in mind this rule: a culprit's first duty is to deny.

SERVANT GIRL. Yes, but you said just now that I was no culprit, but that it was the master.

ADVOCATE. You are the culprit inasmuch as you have stolen, but inasmuch as you have asked for counsel it is my clear duty to whitewash you and to have your master convicted. Therefore, and for the last time, deny! (*To the Witnesses.*) And you witnesses, what evidence are you going to give? Listen to me: a good witness must stick to the facts. Note well, therefore, that the question is not whether Alma has stolen or not; the question is only whether Alexandersson has said that she stole, for, mark well, Alexandersson is not entitled to substantiate his assertion, and we are. Why, the devil

## THE BOND

only knows! But that does not concern you. So then: your tongues between your teeth and your fingers on the Bible!

DAIRYMAID. Lord Jesus, I'm that scared I don't know what to say.

THRESHER. Say what I say and you'll tell no lies.

### SCENE 4

(*The Former. The DISTRICT JUDGE and the PASTOR.*)

JUDGE. Thank you for your sermon, Rector.

PASTOR. Don't mention it, Judge.

JUDGE. Well, as you know, this is my first Assizes. I have really been afraid of this career into which I have been thrown almost against my will. For one thing, the laws are so imperfect, the course of justice so uncertain, and human nature so full of falsehood and dissimulation that I have often wondered how a judge can have the courage to pronounce a decided opinion. And to-day you have reawakened my misgivings.

PASTOR. To be conscientious is indeed a duty, but it does not do to be over sensitive. And since all else on earth is imperfect, we can hardly expect judges and their judgments to be infallible.

JUDGE. That may be, but it does not prevent me from feeling an immense responsibility when I hold men's fates in my hands, and when a word from me may have its effect throughout generations. I am thinking now especially of this divorce suit between the Baron and his wife, and I must ask you, who in the Church Council gave husband and wife the two warnings, what is your opinion of their mutual relations and relative guilt?

## THE BOND

PASTOR. That is to say you will either make me the judge or base your judgment upon my testimony. I can but refer you to the minutes of the Church Council.

JUDGE. Oh, I know the minutes; but it is just what does not appear in them that I need to know.

PASTOR. What the pair accused each other of in private examination is my secret. And besides, how am I to know which of them was speaking the truth and which lied? I must say to you as I said to them – that I have no reason to believe the one more than the other.

JUDGE. But surely you have been able to form some opinion during these proceedings?

PASTOR. I came to one conclusion after hearing one side, and I came to another after hearing the other side. In a word: I cannot have any fixed opinion on this question.

JUDGE. But I have to pronounce a decided opinion, I who know nothing at all.

PASTOR. That is the heavy task of a judge, which I should never be able to carry out.

JUDGE. But there are surely witnesses to be called, evidence to be produced?

PASTOR. No, they do not accuse each other in public. And besides, two false witnesses are complete evidence and one perjurer equally good. Do you suppose that I would base my judgment upon maids' gossip, the chatter of jealous neighbours, or the spite of interested relatives?

JUDGE. You are a terrible sceptic, Pastor!

PASTOR. One becomes so when one has lived sixty years, and has held a cure of souls for forty. Falsehood persists like original sin, and I believe that all men are

## THE BOND

liars. In childhood one lies from fear; as one grows older from interest, necessity, the instinct of self-preservation; and there are those, too, who lie out of pure human kindness. In the present case, as regards this pair, I fancy you will have great difficulty in making out which of them speaks the more truthfully, and I only wish to warn you not to let any prejudice come upon you unawares. You yourself are newly married and under the spell of a young woman, you may therefore easily be swayed in favour of a young and charming lady who is an unhappy wife and, further, a mother. On the other hand, you yourself have recently become a father and, as such, cannot but be moved by the father's impending separation from his only child. Beware of sympathy with either side, for sympathy with one is cruelty towards the other.

JUDGE. There is one thing, however, that lightens my task, and that is that the pair are agreed upon the main point.

PASTOR. Don't rely upon that; they all say so, but when they come before the Court, the thing bursts into a blaze; it only needs a spark to set it alight. Here come the jury. Good-bye for the present. I will remain, although I do not have to appear.

### SCENE 5

*(The Former. The twelve JURYMEN. The SHERIFF'S OFFICER rings a bell in the open doorway at back. The members of the Court take their seats, people pour in.)*

JUDGE. In accordance with the provisions of the Criminal Code, relating to the Peace of Assize, in its

## THE BOND

eleventh chapter, fifth, sixth and eighth paragraphs, I hereby declare the proceedings of the Court open. (*Whispers to the NOTARY, then aloud*): The newly elected Jury will please take the oath.

(JURYMEN rise, lay their fingers on the Bible and all speak together except when their names are called.)

I, Alexander Eklund,  
I, Emanuel Wickberg,  
I, Karl Johan Sjöberg,  
I, Erik Otto Boman,  
I, Erenfrid Söderberg,  
I, Olof Andersson of Vik,  
I, Karl Peter Andersson of Berga,  
I, Axel Vallin,  
I, Anders Erik Ruth,  
I, Sven Oskar Erlin,  
I, August Alexander Vass,  
I, Ludvig Ostman

(*All at once, in time, in a low tone and mezza voce*) promise and swear by God and His holy gospel, that I will and shall, to the best of my understanding and conscience, in all verdicts do justice, not less to the poor than to the rich, and will judge according to the law of God and of Sweden, and as the law directs; (*in a higher tone and louder voices*) never to distort law or to favour wrong for kinship's sake, by blood or marriage, friendship's sake, envy, illwill or fear, nor yet for bribes and gifts or any other consideration whatever, and not to declare him guilty who is guiltless, nor him guiltless who is guilty. (*Raising their voices still higher.*) Neither will I, before



## THE BOND

judgment nor after, reveal to those in Court, nor yet to others the deliberations which the Court holds within locked doors. All this I will and shall as an honest and upright judge truly hold without evil craft or contrivance. (*Pause.*) So help me God in body and soul!

(*The JURYMEN sit down.*)

JUDGE (*to the SHERIFF'S OFFICER*). Call the case of Alma Jonsson versus Farmer Alexandersson.

### SCENE 6

(*The Former. The ADVOCATE, ALEXANDERSSON, the SERVANT GIRL, the DAIRYMAID, the THRESHER.*)

SHERIFF'S OFFICER (*calls out*). The servant girl, Alma Jonsson versus Farmer Alexandersson.

ADVOCATE. I submit the power of attorney of the prosecutrix, Alma Jonsson.

JUDGE (*examines the document.*) The servant girl, Alma Jonsson, in the summons taken out against her former master, Alexandersson, claims that he is liable, pursuant to the sixteenth chapter of the Criminal Code, paragraph eight, to be imprisoned for six months or to pay a fine, on the ground that he, Alexandersson, called her a thief without having substantiated his charge or instituted proceedings. Alexandersson, what have you to say?

ALEXANDERSSON. I called her a thief because I saw her stealing.

JUDGE. Have you witnesses to the fact that she stole?

ALEXANDERSSON. No, as it happened I had no one with me. I mostly go about alone.

## THE BOND

JUDGE. Why did you not prosecute the girl?

ALEXANDERSSON. Because I never do go to law. For the matter of that, it's not the way of us masters to make a fuss about house theft — partly because it's so common, partly because we don't want to ruin the servants' future.

JUDGE. Alma Jonsson, what have you to say in answer to this?

ALMA JONSSON. We—e—ell . . .

ADVOCATE. You be quiet! (*To the JUDGE.*) Alma Jonsson, who in this case is not defendant but prosecutrix, asks that her witnesses be heard in order that Alexandersson's slander may be proved.

JUDGE. Since Alexandersson pleads guilty to the slander, I require no witnesses. On the other hand, it is important for me to know whether Alma Jonsson is guilty of the misdemeanour, for if Alexandersson had reasonable grounds for his statement, that will have an effect in mitigation of sentence.

ADVOCATE. I must take exception to that contention of the Judge, in virtue of the sixteenth chapter of the Penal Code, paragraph thirteen, whereby one charged with slander is debarred from bringing evidence of the truth of his defamation.

JUDGE. The parties, the witnesses and the public will retire while the Court deliberates.

*(All go out except the members of the Court.)*

### SCENE 7

*(The COURT.)*

JUDGE. Is Alexandersson a trustworthy and honest man?

## THE BOND

MEMBERS OF THE JURY. Alexandersson is a trustworthy man.

JUDGE. Is Alma Jonsson known as an honest servant?

ERIK OTTO BOMAN. Alma Jonsson was dismissed for pilfering at my house last year.

JUDGE. None the less, I must now sentence Alexandersson to pay a fine. There is no help for it. Is he poor?

LUDVIG OSTMAN. He is in arrears with his taxes and his crops failed last year; so he's in no position to stand a fine.

JUDGE. And yet I can find no reason to adjourn the case, since the facts are clear and Alexandersson is debarred from calling evidence. Has anyone anything to add or objections to raise?

ALEXANDER EKLUND. I'd just like to allow myself a general observation. A case like this, in which one who is not only blameless but also the injured party, must bear the punishment, while the thief has her so-called honour restored, may easily result in people growing less lenient with their neighbours and law-suits becoming commoner.

JUDGE. That is very possible, but general observations are out of place in the records, and judgment must be pronounced. I therefore only ask the jury whether Alexandersson can be held guilty according to the sixteenth chapter of the Penal Code, paragraph thirteen.

JURY. Yes!

JUDGE (*to the SHERIFF'S OFFICER*). Call in the parties and the witnesses.

## THE BOND

### SCENE 8

*(All come in.)*

JUDGE. In the case between Alma Jonsson and Farmer Alexandersson, Alexandersson is sentenced to pay a fine of one hundred crowns for slander.

ALEXANDERSSON. But I actually saw her stealing! That's what one gets for being soft-hearted!

ADVOCATE *(to the SERVANT GIRL)*. Now, you see. If only you deny a charge, all goes right. Alexandersson was foolish and denied nothing. If I had been his Counsel and he had denied the charge, I should at once have challenged your witnesses, and where would you have been? Now let us go out and settle up this business.

*(He goes out with the SERVANT GIRL and witnesses.)*

ALEXANDERSSON *(to the SHERIFF'S OFFICER)*. And now, I suppose I'll have to make out a testimonial for Alma, and put down that she was honest and well-behaved.

SHERIFF'S OFFICER. That is not my affair.

ALEXANDERSSON *(to the CONSTABLE)*. And as a consequence I must give up house and land! Who would have thought that justice was like this, that the thief should get the honour and the victim get the rod! The devil! Come along later and have a coffee with something in it, Oman.

CONSTABLE. Yes, I'll come presently, but don't shout!

ALEXANDERSSON. Yes, I'll be damned if I don't, even if it costs me three months.

CONSTABLE. Now, don't shout, don't shout!

## THE BOND

### SCENE 9

*(The Farmer.)*

JUDGE. *(to the SHERIFF'S OFFICER.)* Call the divorce case between Baron Sprengel and his wife, born Malmberg.

SHERIFF'S OFFICER. The divorce case between Baron Sprengel and his wife, born Malmberg.

*(The BARON and BARONESS enter.)*

JUDGE. In the summons taken out against his wife Baron Sprengel has made it clear that he does not intend further to continue the marriage and, since the warnings of the Church Council have proved unavailing, petitions for one year's separation in bed and board. What objection, Baroness, have you to make to this?

BARONESS. To the separation I make no objection if only I may keep my child. That is my condition.

JUDGE. The law recognizes no condition in a case like this, and it is for the Court to determine the question of the custody of the child.

BARONESS. That is most extraordinary!

JUDGE. And it is therefore of great importance for the Judge to ascertain who is the cause of the dissension upon which the plea for divorce is based. From the annexed minutes of the Church Council it appears that the wife allowed that she had at times a quarrelsome and difficult temper, while the husband admits no fault. The Baroness thus appears to have acknowledged . . .

BARONESS. That is a lie!

JUDGE. I cannot easily admit that the minutes of the Church Council, attested by the Rector and eight other credible witnesses, are in error.

## THE BOND

BARONESS. The document is false!

JUDGE. Such expressions cannot be addressed to the Court with impunity.

BARON. May I call attention to the fact that I have voluntarily resigned the child to the Baroness upon certain conditions.

JUDGE. And I repeat yet once more what I said just now, that it is for the Judge and not for the parties to decide the issue. And so, Baroness, you deny that you are the cause of the dissension?

BARONESS. Yes, indeed I do! It takes two to make a quarrel.

JUDGE. Baroness, this is no quarrel but a criminal action. Moreover, you seem now to be displaying a contentious disposition and an uncompromising attitude.

BARONESS. Then you don't know my husband.

JUDGE. Please explain yourself, for I cannot pronounce judgment upon insinuations.

BARON. In that case I ask that the suit be dismissed so that I may seek divorce by other means.

JUDGE. The case is already before the Court and must proceed. You assert then, Baroness, that your husband caused the breach. Can that be proved?

BARONESS. Yes, it can be proved.

JUDGE. Then do so, please, but bear in mind that this involves depriving the Baron of his rights both of fatherhood and property.

BARONESS. He has forfeited those many times over. Not least when he denied me sleep and food.

BARON. As to that, I must explain that I have never denied her sleep. I have only begged her not to sleep

## THE BOND

till dinner time, since that meant neglecting the house and leaving the child without supervision. As for food, I have always left the control of that to the mistress of the house, and only objected to a number of extravagant entertainments at a time when the neglected household could not stand such expenses.

BARONESS. And he has left me lying ill without sending for the doctor.

BARON. The Baroness has a habit of falling ill whenever she does not get her own way, but that kind of illness is soon over. After I had once called in a professor from the town, and he had made it clear that her illness was nothing but a sham, I summoned no doctor for her next attack — due to the new pier-glass being cheaper by fifty crowns than the one she wanted.

JUDGE. None of this is of a nature which can be taken into consideration in determining so grave a case. There must be more serious reasons.

BARONESS. It ought surely to be accounted a reason that a father will not allow a mother to bring up her own child.

BARON. In the first place, the Baroness has left the care of the child to a maid and, when she herself has taken a hand, things have always gone wrong. In the second place, she has wanted to bring up the boy as a woman instead of as a man; thus she let him go about in girls' clothes until he was four years old and, to this day, at eight, he wears his hair long like a girl, is made to sew and crochet and even to play with dolls, all of which I consider harmful to the child's normal development into a man. At the same time she has amused herself by dressing our people's daughters as boys, has

## THE BOND

cut their hair and set them to such work as is usually done by boys. In a word, I took my son's upbringing in hand when I noticed these insane symptoms which before now have been seen to lead to conflict with the eighteenth chapter of the Penal Code.

BARONESS. And yet now you are willing to leave the child in the mother's care!

BARON. Yes, for I never entertained the cruel idea of separating child from mother, and, besides, the mother promises improvement. For the matter of that, I only promised conditionally and on the assumption that the law did not concern itself with the question; but since we have started recriminations I have changed my mind, especially as from being prosecutor I have come to be defendant.

BARONESS. That's the way this man always keeps his promises.

BARON. My promises, like other people's, have always been conditional and, so long as the conditions were observed, I have kept faith.

BARONESS. Thus, he promised me personal freedom in marriage.

BARON. On the assumption, naturally, that the laws of decency would not be violated, but when all bounds were overstepped, and licence stepped in under the name of freedom, I considered my promise void.

BARONESS. And for that reason he plagued me with the most preposterous jealousy, which is always enough to make married life unbearable. He was even absurd enough to be jealous of the doctor.

BARON. The jealousy amounted to my protesting against the employment of a notorious and gossiping



## THE BOND

masseur for an ailment usually treated by a woman, unless the Baroness is referring to the occasion when I turned out the steward who was smoking in the drawing-room and offering her cigars.

BARONESS. Since we seem to be abandoning all decency, it is as well for the whole truth to come out. The Baron has committed adultery. Isn't that enough to make him unfit for the sole charge of my child?

JUDGE. Can you prove this?

BARONESS. Yes, indeed I can. Here are the letters.

JUDGE (*takes the letters*). How long ago was this?

BARONESS. A year ago.

JUDGE. Then the time for instituting proceedings has expired, but the fact itself weighs heavily against the husband and may result in him losing the child and his share in the settlement. Do you admit the adultery, Baron?

BARON. I do, with remorse and shame; but there are extenuating circumstances. I was reduced to a humiliating celibacy by the calculated coldness of the Baroness, although I only begged courteously, as a favour, that which the law allows me as a right. I grew weary of buying her love when she introduced prostitution into my marriage and sold her favours, first for power, then for gifts and money, and I found myself finally, and with her express approval, compelled to enter into an irregular union.

JUDGE. Had you given your consent, Baroness?

BARONESS. No. It is not true! I demand proof!

BARON. It is true, but I cannot prove it, since the only witness, my wife, denies it.

JUDGE. Unproved is not necessarily untrue, but an

## THE BOND

JUDGE. Will you swear that you are innocent of this charge?

BARONESS. Yes!

BARON. Good God! No! She mustn't do that! No perjury, I beg!

JUDGE. I ask yet once more; Baroness, will you take the oath?

BARONESS. Yes!

BARON. Permit me to observe that the Baroness is at the moment prosecutrix and one does not prosecute on oath.

JUDGE. Since you have brought a charge against her, she is defendant. What is the opinion of the Jury?

EMANUEL WICKBERG. As the Baroness is a party to the suit, it appears to me that she can hardly give evidence on her own behalf.

SVEN OSKAR ERLIN. It seems to me that, if the Baroness is to give evidence on oath, the Baron should be allowed to do the same; if oath does not tally with oath, the whole affair remains in the dark.

AUGUST ALEXANDER VASS. This is, in fact, not a question of the oath of a witness, but of an oath establishing innocence.

ANDERS ERIK RUTH. That, surely, is the first question to decide.

AXEL VALLIN. But not in the presence of the parties; the deliberations of the Court are not public.

KARL JOHAN SJÖBERG. The jury's right to speak is not limited by any conditions of secrecy.

JUDGE. I can obtain no guidance from so many dissimilar opinions. But, since the Baron's offence can

## THE BOND

be proved, and that of the Baroness is yet unproved, I must require the Baroness to take the oath of innocence.

BARONESS. I am ready.

JUDGE. No, wait a moment! Baron, if you are given time, can you produce evidence or witnesses in support of your charge?

BARON. I neither can nor will, for I am not anxious to have my dishonour made public.

JUDGE. The proceedings of the Court are adjourned while I confer with the President of the Church Council.

*(Steps down from the Bench and goes out to the right.)*

### SCENE 10

*(The Former. The JURORS confer among themselves in low tones. The BARON and BARONESS in the background. Members of the public talk in groups.)*

BARON *(to BARONESS)*. You do not shrink from perjury?

BARONESS. I shrink from nothing where my child is concerned.

BARON. But supposing I have evidence?

BARONESS. But you haven't.

BARON. The letters were burned, but certified copies are in existence.

BARONESS. You are lying to frighten me.

BARON. To show you how deeply I love my child and to save at least the mother, since I am lost, here, take the proofs — but do not be ungrateful. *(Hands her a packet of letters.)*

BARONESS. I knew before that you were a liar, but even so I didn't suppose you were scoundrel enough to have the letters copied.

## THE BOND

BARON. So this is your gratitude! But now we are both lost.

BARONESS. Yes, let us both perish – then there will be an end to the strife.

BARON. Is it better for the child to lose both parents and be left alone in the world? . . .

BARONESS. That can never happen.

BARON. Your preposterous conceit, which leads you to believe yourself above the law and your fellow creatures, has deluded you into starting this quarrel in which there can be only one loser – our son! What were you thinking of when you began this attack which could not fail to provoke a defence? It was not of the child! Was it of revenge? Revenge for what? For my discovery of your guilt?

BARONESS. The child? Were you thinking of the child when you stood there and besmirched me before this rabble?

BARON. Hélène! – We have torn one another cruelly like wild beasts, we have laid bare our shame before all these people who rejoice at our ruin, for we have not one friend in this room. Our child will not, after this, be able to speak with pride of his parents; he will go out into life without a recommendation from father and mother; he will see his home shunned, and us, in our old age, alone and scorned, and so the day will come when he will flee from us.

BARONESS. Then what do you want to do?

BARON. Let us go abroad as soon as the place is sold.

BARONESS. And begin the quarrel over again! I know how it will be. You will be tame enough for a week, and then you will abuse me.

## THE BOND

BARON. Think, our fate is even now being settled in there. You cannot count on one good word from the Pastor whom you have just called a liar; I, who am known to be an unbeliever, can expect no mercy. Oh, that I could lie beneath a vault of roots out in the forest and thrust my head under a stone – I am so ashamed!

BARONESS. That is true: the parson hates us both, and it may turn out as you say. You had better speak to him.

BARON. What about? A reconciliation?

BARONESS. About anything you please, if only it be not too late! Think if it were too late! What does that Alexandersson want, slinking round us all the time? I am afraid of that man!

BARON. Alexandersson is a decent fellow.

BARONESS. To you, yes, but not to me – I have seen those looks before! – Go to the Pastor now, but first take my hand – I am so frightened.

BARON. Of what, my dear, of what?

BARONESS. I don't know – of everything, everyone!

BARON. But not of me?

BARONESS. Not any longer. It is as though we had been dragged into a mill and got our clothes entangled in the wheels! And all these malignant people stand and look on laughing! – What have we done? What have we done in our anger? Think how they will enjoy it, these people who see the Baron and Baroness stripped and scourging each other – Oh, I feel as if I were standing here naked! (*She fastens her cloak again.*)

BARON. Calm yourself, my dear! This is hardly the place to say to you what I have said before: one has only one friend and one home, but we could begin over again. – God knows! No, we can't do that. It has gone

## THE BOND

too far. It is finished! And this last, yes, let it be the last! And it had to come after all the rest. – No, we are enemies for life! And if I let you go now with the child, you may marry again – I see that now – and then my child will have a step-father, and I shall see another man going about with my wife and child. – Or else I myself may be going about with another man's harlot on my arm! No! – Either you or I! One of us must go under! You or I!

BARONESS. You! For if I let you go with the child, then you will be able to marry again, and I may come to see another woman mother of my child. Oh, the thought is enough to make me a murderess. A step-mother for *my* child!

BARON. You might have thought of that before, but when you saw how I gnawed at the chain of love that bound me to you, you supposed that I could not love another.

BARONESS. Do you suppose I ever loved you?

BARON. Yes, at one time at least. When I was unfaithful to you. Then your love was sublime. And your pretended scorn made you irresistible. But you even came to respect me after my misconduct – whether it was the male or the culprit you most admired, I don't know, but I think it was both – it must have been both, for you are the most thorough-going woman I have known. And you are jealous already of the wife of whom I have not even thought. What a pity you became my wife! As my mistress you would have had an undisputed triumph, and your infidelities would have been merely a bouquet added to the wine of my youth.

BARONESS. Yes, your love was always sensual!

## THE BOND

BARON. Sensual like all things spiritual and spiritual like all things sensual! My weakness towards you, which was the strength of my feeling, gave you the notion that you were the stronger, whereas you were only more malicious, more brutal, more unscrupulous than I.

BARONESS. You the stronger? You, who never want the same thing for two minutes together, and, when all is said, don't know what you want.

BARON. Yes, I know quite well what I want, but there is room in me for both hatred and love, and I love you at one moment and hate you the next. Just now I hate you!

BARONESS. And are you thinking of the child now?

BARON. Yes, now and always! And do you know why? Because he is our love which took flesh. He is the memory of our most beautiful moments, the bond which unites our souls, the meeting-place where we come together always, whether we will or no. And that is why we can never be parted even if we are divorced. Oh, if only I could hate you as I would!

### SCENE II

(*The Former. The JUDGE and the PASTOR, in conversation, stand in the foreground.*)

JUDGE. Thus I recognize the utter hopelessness of seeking justice or discovering the truth. And it seems to me that the laws are a couple of centuries behind our ideas of right. Did I not have to punish Alexandersson, who was innocent, and to exonerate that thieving servant girl? And as for this divorce case, I know to this

## THE BOND

moment nothing, and cannot take it on my conscience to give judgment.

PASTOR. Yet judgment must be given.

JUDGE. Not by me! I shall resign my office and choose another career.

PASTOR. Oh, a scandal like that would only make you a byword and close all careers to you. Go on for a few years as a judge, and you will find that it becomes quite easy to crush human destinies like egg-shells. For the rest, if you want to get out of this affair, just let the jury outvote you, and the responsibility will be theirs.

JUDGE. That is one way, and I believe they will be practically unanimous against me, for I have an opinion in this matter, although I reached it intuitively and dare not therefore rely upon it. . . . Thank you for the advice!

SHERIFF'S OFFICER (*who has been talking to ALEXANDERSSON, steps up to the JUDGE*). In my capacity of Public Prosecutor I have to announce Farmer Alexandersson as a witness against the Baroness Sprengel.

JUDGE. Touching the adultery?

SHERIFF'S OFFICER. Yes.

JUDGE (*to the PASTOR*). This gives a new turn to the investigation.

PASTOR. Oh, there are plenty of clues, if only one can get hold of them.

JUDGE. Nevertheless it is horrible to see two people who have been lovers, destroying each other in this way. It is like looking on at slaughter!

PASTOR. You see, Judge, that is love!

JUDGE. What then is hate?



## THE BOND

beg leave to hand to the Judge the whole correspondence which gives full proof of the Baroness' adultery. . . . Here are the originals; copies of them will be found on the person of the defendant.

*(The BARONESS gives a cry, but recovers herself.)*

JUDGE. Yet a moment ago, Baroness, you were prepared to take the oath?

BARONESS. But I did not do so! Well, now, I suppose we can be quits, the Baron and I.

JUDGE. We do not set off one crime against another. The account of each must be settled separately.

BARONESS. Then I want to put in a claim now against the Baron for my dowry which he has dissipated.

JUDGE. If the Baron has dissipated the Baroness' dowry, it would be well to settle the matter now.

BARON. The Baroness brought into the marriage six thousand crowns in shares which were unsaleable and became valueless. As she was employed as a telegraph operator at the time of our marriage, and made it clear that she had no wish to be supported by her husband, we entered into an agreement on the understanding that each should be self-supporting. However, after the marriage she lost her position, and I have been supporting her ever since. To this I have made no objection, but since she now raises the question of accounts, I shall take the liberty of presenting my counter-claim. It amounts to thirty-five thousand crowns, this being one-third of the expenses of the household during our marriage, for I take two-thirds upon myself.

JUDGE. Have you this agreement in writing?

BARON. No, I have not.

## THE BOND

JUDGE. Have you, Baroness, any documents showing the disposal of your dowry?

BARONESS. I didn't think it necessary at the time to have anything in writing, since I supposed myself to be dealing with honourable people.

JUDGE. Then I cannot take the question into consideration. — The Jury will please retire to the small court to deliberate and come to a decision.

### SCENE 13

*(The JURY and the JUDGE go out to the right.)*

ALEXANDERSSON *(to the SHERIFF'S OFFICER)*. I can't make head or tail of this justice!

SHERIFF'S OFFICER. I think it would be wisest for you to go home now, otherwise the same thing might happen to you that happened to the peasant from Mariestad. Did you hear about that?

ALEXANDERSSON. No.

SHERIFF'S OFFICER. Well, he went to the Court as an onlooker, was drawn into the case as a witness, became a party to it, and ended by getting twenty lashes.

ALEXANDERSSON. The devil he did! But I can believe it of them. I believe there's nothing they wouldn't do. *(Goes out.)*

*(The BARON joins the BARONESS in the foreground.)*

BARONESS. You find it hard to keep away from me?

BARON. Hélène! Now that I have stabbed you, I bleed myself, for your blood is mine. . . .

BARONESS. And how good you are at making out accounts.

## THE BOND

self why you are so fanatical upon this point, but it is the struggle for survival which pursues us and will not let us loose our grip. Our son has your body but my soul, and you cannot uproot that. You will find me again in him when you least expect it; you will find in him my thoughts, my tastes, my passions, and for these you will one day hate him as you hate me. That is what I fear!

BARONESS. You still seem a little afraid that he is going to be mine.

BARON. In your character of mother and woman you have an advantage over me before these gentlemen who are our judges, and although no doubt Justice throws the dice blindfold, they are always loaded.

BARONESS. You can still make pretty speeches at the moment of separation. Perhaps you don't hate me as much as you pretend to?

BARON. To speak frankly, I suppose it is my dishonour rather than you that I hate, though there is no lack of that either. And why this terrible hatred? Perhaps I had forgotten that you were nearly forty, and perhaps it is just this masculine element, which I have perceived in your kisses, in your embraces, that is so repulsive to me.

BARONESS. Perhaps it is! For, though you are not aware of it, the great sorrow of my life has been that I was not born a man.

BARON. Perhaps that has come to be the sorrow of *my* life. And now you revenge yourself for nature's trick by trying to bring up your son as a woman. Will you promise me one thing?

BARONESS. Will *you* promise me one thing?

## THE BOND

BARON. What's the use of promising? We never keep our promises.

BARONESS. No! Let us make no more promises.

BARON. Will you give me a true answer to one question?

BARONESS. Even if I told you the truth you would think I was lying.

BARON. Yes. So I should.

BARONESS. You see now that it is the end, for ever!

BARON. For ever! For ever, as we once swore to love one another.

BARONESS. It's a pity that one has to swear such things.

BARON. Why so? It is always a bond, such as it is.

BARONESS. I never could endure a bond.

BARON. Do you think it would have been better if we had not bound ourselves?

BARONESS. Yes, for me.

BARON. I wonder! Then you would have had no hold on me.

BARONESS. Nor you on me.

BARON. Then it would have come to much the same thing – like a reduced fraction. So it's not the law's fault, not our fault, no one else's fault. And yet we must bear the blame.

*(The SHERIFF'S OFFICER approaches.)*

Ah! Now our fate is decided. – Farewell, Hélène!

BARONESS. Farewell – Axel!

BARON. It is hard to part. And impossible to live together. But at least the strife is over!

BARONESS. If only it were! I fear it is but beginning.

## THE BOND

SHERIFF'S OFFICER. The parties are to withdraw while the Court deliberates.

BARONESS. Axel, a word before it is too late! It is quite possible that they will take the child from both of us! Drive home, therefore, and carry the boy to your mother, and later we will flee – far away!

BARON. I believe you want to trick me again.

BARONESS. No, I don't. I am not thinking of you any longer, nor of myself, nor of revenge. Only save the child! Do you hear? Do it!

BARON. I will, but if you are deceiving me! However, I will do it. (*Goes out hurriedly.*)

(*The BARONESS goes out at the back.*)

### SCENE 14

(*The JURY and the JUDGE enter and resume their seats.*)

JUDGE. The case being now complete, I will ask the Jury to state their views before judgment is given. For my own part, I can see no reasonable course other than to assign the child to the mother, since both parties are equally to blame for the estrangement, and the mother is naturally better qualified than the father to be the guardian of the child.

(*Silence.*)

ALEXANDER EKLUND. According to actual law the wife takes the husband's status and condition, not the husband the wife's.

EMANUEL WICKBERG. And the husband is the wife's legal guardian.

KARL JOHAN SJÖBERG. The wedding ritual, which

gives binding force to the marriage, requires the wife to obey her husband, whence it seems to me that the man comes before the woman.

ERIK OTTO BOMAN. And the children are to be brought up in the father's faith.

ERENFRID SÖDERBERG. From which it follows that the child goes with the father and not with the mother.

OLOF ANDERSSON OF VIK. But, as in the case before us, both are equally to blame and, in view of all that has to come to light, equally unfit to bring up a child, I consider that the child ought to be taken from both.

KARL PETER ANDERSSON OF BERGA. Concurring with Olof Andersson, I call to mind that in such cases the Judge nominates two trustees, who take charge of the children and the property, and allow maintenance from it to husband, wife and child.

AXEL VALLIN. In that case, I would like to propose as trustees Alexander Eklund and Erenfrid Söderberg, who are both known for their upright life and Christian character.

ANDERS ERIK RUTH. I agree with Olof Andersson as to the separation of the child from both father and mother, and with Axel Vallin concerning the trustees, whose Christian character renders them peculiarly fitted for the upbringing of the child.

SVEN OSKAR ERLIN. I agree with what has just been said.

AUGUST ALEXANDER VASS. Agreed!

LUDVIG OSTMAN. Agreed!

JUDGE. As the opinion of the Jury now seems by a majority to differ from mine, I will ask the Jury to proceed to a vote. I ought perhaps to put as a motion Olof

## THE BOND

Andersson's proposal to separate the child from both father and mother and to appoint trustees. Is this the unanimous opinion of the Jury?

JURY. Yes.

JUDGE. If anyone dissents from the motion let him hold up his hand. (*No one moves.*) The opinion of the Jury has consequently prevailed over mine, and I enter upon the record a protest against what seems to me a needlessly cruel verdict. — The parties are sentenced to one year's separation in bed and board, on pain of imprisonment if during that time they approach one another. (*To the SHERIFF'S OFFICER.*) Call in the parties.

### SCENE 15

(*The Former. The BARONESS and the Public enter.*)

JUDGE. Is Baron Sprengel not present?

BARONESS. The Baron will be here directly.

JUDGE. He who is not in time has only himself to blame. The judgment of the Court is that the spouses Sprengel be sentenced to one year's separation in bed and board, and that the child be taken from the parents and assigned to two trustees to be brought up, whereunto the Court has accordingly nominated and ordained the Jurors, Alexander Eklund and Erenfrid Söderberg.

(*The BARONESS screams and sinks to the floor. The SHERIFF'S OFFICER and the CONSTABLE lift her up and place her on a chair. Some of the Public have meanwhile gone out.*)

BARON (*enters*). My Lord Judge, having heard outside the judgment of the Court, I wish to protest both

## THE BOND

against the Jury who are my personal enemies and against the trustees, Alexander Eklund and Erenfrid Söderberg, neither of whom possesses the financial status which is required of trustees; moreover, I shall take proceedings against the Judge for incompetence in the discharge of his office, in that he failed to discern that the party who first broke the marriage tie was the cause of the other's breach, and that therefore both are not equally responsible.

JUDGE. Whoever is not content with the judgment is at liberty to appeal to the High Court within the prescribed period. The Jury will please proceed to the inspection of dilapidations at the Parsonage in and for the case against the surveyors to the Local Council.

*(The JUDGE and the JURY go out at the back.)*

### SCENE 16

*(The BARON and the BARONESS. The Public stroll out.)*

BARONESS *(rises)*. Where is Émile?

BARON. He was gone.

BARONESS. You are lying!

BARON *(after a pause)*. Yes. — I did not take him to my mother because I do not trust her, but to the Parsonage.

BARONESS. To the Parson!

BARON. Your one trustworthy enemy. Yes! Whom else should I dare to trust? And I did it because I lately saw a look in your eyes which told me that you might kill yourself and the child.

BARONESS. You saw that! — Oh, why did I let myself be tricked into trusting you?



## THE BOND

BARON. And what have you to say about all this now?

BARONESS. I don't know. But I am so tired that I no longer feel the blows. It seems almost a relief to have received the finishing stroke.

BARON. You don't realize what will happen now: how your son will be brought up by two peasants whose want of breeding and coarse manners will slowly torture the child to death; how he will be forced down into their narrow sphere; how his intelligence will be choked by religious superstition; how he will be taught contempt for his father and mother. . . .

BARONESS. Stop! Don't say any more or I shall lose my reason. My Émile among peasant wives, who don't wash themselves, who have bugs in the beds and can't tell if a comb is clean! My Émile! No, it's impossible!

BARON. That is the precise position, and you have no one but yourself to blame.

BARONESS. Myself? Yes, but did I make myself? Did I put the evil propensities, the hatred and wild passions into myself? No! And who denied me the power and the will to resist them? – When I look at myself at this moment I feel it is hard on me. Isn't it?

BARON. Indeed it is. It is hard on us both. We tried to avoid the rocks of marriage by living together without being married; but even so we quarrelled, and we missed one of life's greatest boons – the respect of our fellows – and so we married. But we thought to outwit society and its laws; we would have no marriage ceremony, but only entangled ourselves in a civil contract. We would stand in no dependence on each other . . . not have a common purse, claim no rights to one another's person – and thus it all went back into the old

rut again! Marriage, without the ceremony and with the contract. And then that broke down! I forgave your infidelity and for the child's sake we lived together in voluntary separation – so voluntary! But I grew tired of introducing my friend's mistress as my wife – and so we had to part. Do you know with what, do you know with whom we strove? You call him God, but I call him nature. And that power incited us to hatred just as He incites mankind to love. And now we are doomed to lacerate each other so long as there remains in us a spark of life. New proceedings in the Court of Appeal, revision of the case, Church Council's hearing, Chapter's pronouncement, Supreme Court's decision. And then come my notice to the Solicitor General, my application for the custody, your protest and counter-proceedings – from pillar to post! And without finding one merciful executioner! Mismanagement of the estate, financial ruin, the child's neglected education! And why do we not put an end to these two miserable lives? Because the child holds us back! – You weep, but I cannot. Not even when I think of the night about to fall in our desolate home. And you, poor Hélène, who are to go back to your mother! Your mother, whom you once left with a glad heart to come to a home of your own. To become her daughter again . . . perhaps that will prove worse than being a wife! – One year! Two years! Countless years! How many more do you think we can endure?

BARONESS. I will never go back to my mother! Never! I shall wander about on the roads and in the woods, so that I may hide myself and be able to scream – to scream myself tired against God who has put this

/infernial love into the world to torment mankind. And when its grows dark, I shall lay myself down in the Parsonage barn that I may sleep near my child.

BARON. You think you'll sleep to-night, do you?

## LADY JULIE

JEAN. I? No man is more full of feeling than I am; but I'm able to control myself.

JULIE. Just now you could kiss my shoe – and now?

JEAN (*hardly*). Yes, then! Now we've got something else to think of.

JULIE. Don't speak cruelly to me!

JEAN. No, but sensibly. One folly has been committed – don't commit more! The Count may be here any moment, and before he comes our fates must be settled. What do you think of my plans for the future? Do you approve of them?

JULIE. They seem to me quite reasonable; but just one question: so large an undertaking requires considerable capital; have you got that?

JEAN (*chewing his cigar*). Have I? Certainly I have! I have my professional skill, my unrivalled experience, my knowledge of languages! That's the sort of capital that counts, I should think!

JULIE. But you can't even buy a railway ticket with that.

JEAN. No doubt; that's why I'm looking for a partner – one who can advance the capital required!

JULIE. Where can you find one at a moment's notice?

JEAN. It's for you to find one, if you want to be my partner.

JULIE. I can't do that, and I've nothing of my own.

(*A pause.*)

JEAN. Then the whole thing falls to the ground . . .

JULIE. And . . .

JEAN. All remains as before!

JULIE. Do you think I'm going to remain under this

## LADY JULIE

roof as your mistress? Do you think I'll have the people pointing their fingers at me? Do you think I can look my father in the face after this? No! Take me away from here – away from this humiliation and disgrace! O God, God, what have I done? (*Weeps.*)

JEAN. So that's the tune now – what have you done? What many have done before you!

JULIE (*screaming hysterically*). And now you despise me! – I'm falling, I'm falling!

JEAN. Fall down to my level, and I'll lift you up again!

JULIE. What dreadful power drew me towards you? The attraction of the weak to the strong? Of the falling to the rising? Or was it love? *This* love? Do you know what love is?

JEAN. Do I? You bet I do! Do you think I've never been with a girl before?

JULIE. What a way to speak! What thoughts to have!

JEAN. That's how I've been brought up and that's what I am! Now don't be hysterical, and don't give yourself airs, for we're both in the same boat now! There, little girl, let me give you a glass of something special!

(*Opens the table drawer and takes out the bottle of wine; fills the two glasses which had been used before.*)

JULIE. Where did you get that wine from?

JEAN. The wine-cellar!

JULIE. My father's burgundy!

JEAN. Isn't it good enough for his son-in-law?

JULIE. And I drink beer myself!

JEAN. That merely shows your tastes are worse than mine.